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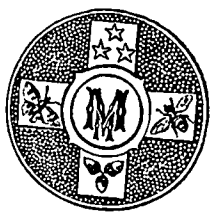
PUBLIC ADDRESSES

BY

JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.



PUBLIC ADDRESSES

BY

JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

EDITED BY

JAMES E. THOROLD ROGERS

'BE JUST AND FEAR NOT'

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1879

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BY E. PICKARD HALL, M.A., AND J. H. STACY,
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PREFACE.

ELEVEN years ago I published two volumes of my friend Mr. Bright's Speeches, having had as now the benefit of his revision in the work which I undertook. Soon after the volumes were published a General Election occurred, and a Government was formed which, aided by a powerful but critical majority, carried a series of political reforms. These measures, for their intrinsic magnitude and for the results which they have already effected, or hereafter will effect, are without parallel since the period which followed on the Reform Act of 1832. Mr. Bright became a member of this Government, and took part, during the time that his health was good, in the measures with which that memorable Parliament and Administration were associated.

The purpose which I had in collecting and publishing the two volumes was partly to exhibit in them what were the leading political opinions of Mr. Bright, opinions in which I had myself been

fortunately educated; partly to supply the English people with examples of the art by which a practised master of their language arranges and expresses his convictions on matters of public interest. A speaker, says the great analyst of the art as it was brought to perfection in Greece, must convince his audience at the very outset; first that he has their interests at heart, next that he is competent to interpret these interests, and thirdly that he is free from any taint of self-seeking. It is not very likely that my friend has gathered the precepts of the art of speaking from the great work of Aristotle, but I am certain that he has succeeded in making his oratory prove that he has always had these purposes before him.

It is hardly necessary to say that the objects with which the two volumes were printed have been completely accomplished. They who may differ from Mr. Bright's estimate of what constitutes a wise, a patriotic, and a necessary policy, must acknowledge that his opinions have been consistent and unfaltering; that, with hardly an exception, he has done more to instruct the minds of such Englishmen as make the public good their highest aim than any other politician, and that he has never followed opinion, but always led it. The second object has been even more fully achieved. If men ever again make a study of the art of public speaking, they will, as surely as the great master of antiquity derived his rules from the practice of those orators whose speeches are among the most

precious fragments of Greek art, refer to the models with which the two volumes have supplied them.

I have often been gratified to see that the most studious and shrewd of the working classes have made Mr. Bright's speeches a household book. More than once I have found that a present of those Speeches was one of the most acceptable gifts which I could make to working men. But any one who cares may learn that the confidence of the best Englishmen is not given to those who would debauch or cajole or flatter them, but to such men as speak the truth which they have learned fearlessly and generously. It may be necessary to wait a while, till such men become the majority, but the best hopes of the nation lie in the fact that such a majority will be gained, and that, when it is once gained, the acquisition will be out of the reach of residual accidents.

The reader of the present volume will find that it is a collection of speeches under the name of Addresses, that it contains no speech in Parliament, and that the Editor has printed these Addresses, with one exception, in chronological order. One of the services which long experience enables a practised speaker to fulfil is that of historical review. To collect a series of facts from the stand-point of some general or dominant principle, and to show that such a principle can account for the victories of a definite policy, is precisely the function which a wise and honest politician, who has lived and worked for that on which he comments, can fulfil for his

countrymen. Such a man is doing the highest office of history in linking the present with the past. He serves also as the instructor of the generation in which he lives, by informing them of the process by which that which is valuable in their present condition has been won, and that which might have been mischievous has been frustrated. It will be seen that Mr. Bright has claimed the great function of doing good to all classes, and hindering mischief as far as possible, to the attitude and action of the Liberal party, and to impulses which are now happily traditional with it. That reform should beget irritation, fear, or hatred, is of course to be expected. That such passions may be manipulated, and be made useful for the purpose of reviving a party, and even of suggesting a policy, may be anticipated. But unless a people be blinded to its own permanent injury, the alliance of such interests as seek to employ the forces of Government against the public good invites a reaction which, when it comes, will be thorough and healthy. No Conservative Government since the Reform Bill of 1832 has ventured on reversing the measures which the party has resisted when in opposition. Mr. Bright will be found in this volume to have dwelt frequently, though with variety of illustration, on the history of Liberal measures, and on the claims which a great party has on public confidence, in consideration of its unvarying character.

Perhaps one of the worst services which the present Parliament has done for the institution of

which it has been an exceptional specimen, is that of causing the marked indifference with which its utterances have been treated by the public. The editors of newspapers have evidently discovered that the purchasers of papers care very little for debates in Parliament. In successive sessions he proceedings in the Houses have been sensibly summarised, and no one complains. A majority which never reasons, but simply votes, has chilled the eloquence which can reason, but cannot persuade. But there is no ground for thinking that the public is less interested in political utterances than it has been. The speeches of public men outside the House are very fully reported, and, it may be concluded, are far more carefully read than those which are uttered in Parliament itself. They are also more worthy of study, not merely as an index of the speaker's capacity, but as proofs of what the speaker thinks should be the means of awakening public opinion and enlisting popular sympathy. There has been no period since the time of the Anti-Corn-Law agitation in which public speaking on topics of public interest has been so largely practised as it has since the accession of the present Government to power. There has certainly been no occasion on which the highest questions of public morality and international duty have been more energetically and on the whole more successfully discussed. It might perhaps, in the lack of all allies, and in the face of European ill-will, have been impossible to have led England into a war in defence

of Turkey, even if the nation had not been warned in time by those who have always understood the true interests of England. But the warning was given and taken, and the Government was at last reduced to boast of its success in airy aims and petty obstructiveness. Under the wholesome discipline of opposition, the Liberal party has found its wisdom in the strength of its convictions and in the courage with which it avows them. Hence, as Mr. Bright has said, it leads though it may not govern.

Most of the addresses in this volume, in so far as they are political, were delivered when the party of which Mr. Bright has been the most consistent representative was in opposition. They therefore illustrate the speaker's power of dealing with the defence of his own positions, and of criticising his opponents' policy. The reader may find that they differ in some degree from those which are contained in the volumes published eleven years ago. As wise men grow older, they become less controversial, and more reflective. They will retain, as worthy men do retain, their dislike of what is false and mean, and may be as competent and as ready to expose impudent sophistry with the touch of Ithuriel's spear as they were in their more active years; but they know much, and pardon much, when the knowledge is of human ignorance, and the pardon is given to human error. I think that I may claim for the addresses of this volume that, apart from their merit as compositions, a merit on

which it would be superfluous for me to dwell, they are characterised by extreme kindliness.

There was no reason why I should have followed the arrangement of the first two volumes, by printing these speeches in groups. They are not—though it is Mr. Bright's custom generally in a political address to deal with one or two topics only, and not to make a general review of a session or a policy—set speeches on a special subject, but utterances which are deliberative and judicial. For it is the essence of politics that, in free states, a policy is always on its trial, and that therefore the modern statesman who speaks must be, to take Aristotle's great divisions of rhetoric, a senator, an advocate, and a critic.

JAMES E. THOROLD ROGERS.

OXFORD, *June* 6, 1879.

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PUBLIC ADDRESSES.

I.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 15, 1863.

[The second anniversary dinner of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce was held on this day at the Hen and Chickens Hotel. Mr. Scholefield, the senior member for the borough of Birmingham, speaking before Mr. Bright, had advocated the practice of capturing the unarmed vessels of a belligerent, on the grounds that such a proceeding checked war, by enlisting mercantile interests against war, and that it crippled an enemy's resources, thereby bringing wars to a speedier termination. He also argued that the emancipation proclamation of President Lincoln, whatever might be its expediency as a war measure, was 'a gigantic confiscation of property,' and that it differed in no particular from the practice of the prize capture of merchant vessels.]

I FEEL great pleasure in being here to-night, and in being greeted as I have been with that cordial welcome which has always been accorded to me ever since I have become connected with Birmingham. I must say, however, that I should have spent a still more pleasant evening had I anticipated that I was to come here to listen and not to speak. Just now I find it extremely difficult to determine what are the topics which are likely to prove interesting, on an occasion like the present, to those whom I have the honour to address.

My hon. friend has, it is true, found no difficulty upon this score. I quite envy the felicity with which he has touched upon those subjects to which he has adverted,

although there is one question which I fear I am not likely to regard in the same light as that in which he looks upon it. Before I came here I asked a member of the Chamber of Commerce whether there was any point on which he thought it particularly desirable that I should make any remarks, but without receiving any satisfactory solution of the question. It seemed to me that the subject of bankruptcy reform was one on which it might be desirable that some comment should be made; but I have come to the conclusion that that reform—very much like some others in this country—leaves us precisely in the same position as we were. There is, however, another question—one of international law—to which my hon. friend has referred, which, although it is of considerable importance, does not seem to me to press upon our attention very much at this moment. International law is not very clearly defined, and the various contradictory opinions which have been expressed, with a view to its elucidation, have tended to puzzle, rather than to inform, unlearned persons; but, as my hon. friend has alluded to what was done at the Congress of Paris, I may be allowed to say that the Ambassadors of the principal European Powers represented at that Congress agreed to a certain alteration of practice in regard to some points of international law,—an alteration which obtained the assent of, I think, every civilised and Christian nation, with the exception of the United States, the Government of which proposed to accept a portion of the propositions of the Congress of Paris, while it did not wish to assent to one of them in the shape in which it was offered. Now, my hon. friend seems to think that an attempt will be made to undo in Parliament that which was accomplished at the Congress of Paris; but I very much doubt whether that will be the case. The fact is, that which was done at Paris was not done because our Government particularly liked it, but because there was no other mode of getting out of the diffi-

culty by which their representatives as well as those of the other European Powers were surrounded.

You recollect, when the war with Russia—a war which, I suppose, most persons now wish had never broken out—commenced, the Queen then issued a proclamation that certain rights of this country as a belligerent nation would be abandoned during the war, and that the property of Russia, if in neutral vessels, would be safe. The reason why the Government of England came to that conclusion was this—that when the Russian war began England was not, to use an insolent phrase, mistress of the seas; while it was felt by England and France that if the old policy of capturing the goods of belligerents in neutral vessels were adhered to with respect to the vessels of the United States, six months would not elapse before we should have to fight, not Russia alone, but that country. It was for that reason, and for that reason only, that our Government assented to the proclamation which was then issued; for that reason, and that only, it was that the proposition which was adopted at the Congress of Paris was made the law of Europe for all future time. That being so, I do not believe there will be any alteration in the declaration then made in the sense of going backwards from it. I at once admit, however, that nothing can be more absurd than the point at which the Congress of Paris stopped short; and if anybody supposes I am not giving the right complexion to the subject, I would ask him to refer to the motion with respect to it which was last Session made by Mr. Horsfall; in speaking upon which I explained the cause of the proposition made in the Congress of Paris as I have explained it to-night. I may add that Lord Palmerston and Mr. Disraeli seemed to accept that explanation as the true one; and it must, therefore, I think, be admitted to be one which is not to be controverted. Under all the circumstances of the case, therefore, it appears to me that the best course is to go forward. You cannot go backward: you have still

the United States, with its great mercantile marine, to take into account, and whatever may be the issue of the present strife, you may take it for granted that the free States of America will stand in the first rank as a maritime Power, that being the reason and the fact which led to the change at the opening of the Russian war. As this reason still continues in force, it would, I think, be wiser and more liberal, more philosophic and more humane, to look forward with a view to progress, rather than to make a retrograde step in the interpretation of international law as between belligerents.

There is another and a kindred question on which I should wish briefly to touch. I mean the question of blockade. It is a question which does not usually press very urgently on a nation at peace; but our attention is directed to it now, because of the blockade of the Southern ports, and of the interruption of commerce between them and this country which has in consequence been effected. It, however, involves considerations with respect to which it is undesirable that we should decide absolutely without very earnest and careful consideration. My hon. friend's argument is, that taking ships at sea, as the Alabama is taking those of the Federal States now, is a description of warfare less horrible than cannonading a town. He says that we are bound to make a war as harassing as we can to those to whom we are opposed, and that then the people engaged in commerce and industrial pursuits generally affected by it will entreat their Government to put an end to it. Lord Palmerston, on the other hand, maintains that no nation is induced to sue for peace as the result of any embarrassment to its commerce; and so far I believe he is right, for I, for one, do not think you can bring any nation, in opposition to its own passions or supposed rights and interests, to consent to peace by the destruction or capture of its merchant vessels. The moment you have a disturbance such as war creates, the moment you have a

host of your merchants whose interest it is that the contest should be prolonged, the moment you get large stocks and high prices, that moment you have a party whose material welfare is deeply involved in its continuance. What, for instance, would be the result to many men in Liverpool if the news were now to arrive that an armistice had taken place between the contending forces in America? Ruin to several who to-day consider themselves to be rolling in wealth would be the consequence. It does not, therefore, follow, because war disturbs commerce, that you can bring the commercial element of a country vigorously to bear in favour of its cessation. The great body of the people, those who are struggling to live on from 10*s.* to 30*s.* a week, may complain of war and the evils which it entails; but you never find in the history of this country or any other that the mercantile classes strongly urge upon their Government the necessity of making peace when once war with all its horrors has broken out.

Now, with respect to the question of blockade, I may observe that, so far as the European Powers are concerned, it must appear perfectly clear that the system of blockade is at an end. You could not blockade Russia during the Crimean war, for her commerce passed through Prussia. You could not blockade Prussia, or France, or Spain, or Italy, or Austria. Seeing that the railways of Europe enter into and pass out of every considerable country on the Continent, it is pretty evident that unless you go to war with them all—a view of the matter which I am sorry to see some Englishmen uphold—a blockade is virtually of very little use. As to the United States, it seems to me that a blockade in that quarter is absolutely impossible, and my opinion therefore is, with regard to the question of international law and the question of blockade—though my opinions on these subjects may be at war with tradition and those which many Englishmen entertain—I yet believe that the more these questions are

thoroughly investigated the more we are driven to the conclusion that it is the interest of all nations, and especially of England, instead of going backward, to render its military policy more humane and more in accordance with the moral code.

Who opposes these alterations? The Government of England only. Russia and France would have accepted the propositions of the United States with regard to free ships as well as free cargoes, and thus have agreed to putting an end to everything like a commercial blockade. If war were made less savage, the passions of men less aroused, and peace made more possible, as I think it would be by means of the change which I have indicated, then the minds of men would, when difficulties happened to spring up between nation and nation, be directed to other modes of settling their disputes than a resort to arms. As it is, we are not advanced in point of fact much beyond the savage Red Indian. Twelve months ago, for instance, when this country was told through its press that an insult was offered to it, though no insult was meant, we did not wait to know whether it was intended to insult us or not, but we sent 10,000 men across the Atlantic to threaten a nation which could put 1,000,000 of men under arms. If a different temper would prevail, and if, when a dispute happened to arise between us and France, or Russia, or the United States, men would in the first instance look to some mode of settling the dispute other than an appeal to arms, my opinion is that the difficulty might be smoothed over much more speedily and with an expenditure of blood and treasure far less costly than in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred we now arrive at.

I admit that I have formed strong opinions on this subject. I make due allowance for all those who take a contrary view, and I would advise no Chamber of Commerce to commit itself hastily to a decision on the point one way or the other. Our statesmen are fearful of going beyond the prejudices of

the people they govern, and are as full of superstition as the rest of us in many things. One of our poets says,—

> 'Old politicians preach on wisdom past,
> And totter on in business to the last.'

Statesmen who commenced their public career during the great war with France are not likely at their time of life to hold opinions so very different from those which they first found in vogue; still I must say that Lord Palmerston did on one occasion, at Liverpool, express opinions entirely in accord with those which I am now uttering. I suppose he found that he had gone a little too far for Lord Derby or Lord Russell, and therefore he was obliged last Session to go back a little, and speak and vote against that which he had himself advocated, or at least had hoped for in strong language, when addressing the merchants of Liverpool. Yet even these old statesmen learn something. We have lately had an instance of this, which is very consolatory to me. I allude to their willingness to cede the Ionian Islands to Greece. That little Republic is occupied by a population not greater than the whole of Birmingham, but one which is very turbulent and ill-affected towards our rule. The islands, moreover, involve us in heavy expense, and I think it is very wise in our Government, and highly honourable to the Queen, to have consented to the proposal which has been made to the Provisional Government of Greece on this matter. It shows that the rapacity for territory has been pretty much satiated in this country—a rapacity which has cost us countless thousands of lives, and countless millions of treasure. It shows, also, that there is a growth of sound opinion throughout the world, because I believe that wherever the knowledge of that proposition has come, although some may have wished it had not been made, yet every man has been willing to admit that it was a course creditable rather than otherwise to the Government by which it was taken. I should like to see it carried

a little further. Many things which I advocate are thought rather foolish at first, but in time people come up to them, and I have the satisfaction of being a little ahead of the Government, and often of the nation.

The other day I made a reference only parenthetically to the cession of the fortress of Gibraltar, and I can conceive how that must have shocked some people. I am not at all anxious to press it, but though it is no doubt a more difficult question than that of the Ionian Islands, yet if men will only discuss it calmly I think they will come to a tolerably unanimous opinion about it. I observe that the foreign newspapers of Germany, France, and Spain have argued from what I said in your town-hall three weeks ago that there is a great party in England favourable to the cession of the Rock of Gibraltar. Now, I make no such pretension whatever. I know that in connexion with that fortress there are memories and associations which may well make the English people pause when they are asked to give it up to Spain; they have been told from their childhood that it is impregnable; and some persons have a notion that what is impregnable must be valuable, though that entirely depends upon whether it is in such a position that it gives great safety to something which is valuable. Now, I believe that most military persons in this country who are not wishing to make out a case, and especially if they happen to be wholly independent of the powers that be, would admit that that rock is of no value whatever to us. It is of no value to us in time of peace, except, perhaps, to smuggle a few goods into Spain; and it would also be of no value equivalent to the cost of maintaining it in time of war. It is to me a monument of a very foolish war and a very dishonourable peace. I believe when it was taken it was taken in the name of Charles III, the 'lawful Sovereign' of Spain, who never happened to become the lawful Sovereign of Spain, and therefore, when the Treaty of Utrecht was concluded,

our allies were sold, and we were permitted to retain Minorca and Gibraltar.

Suppose this company were the chamber of commerce in the city of Madrid, how should we then be likely to view this matter? We have it on the authority of English statesmen that all the relations between the two countries, and every negotiation between them from that time to this, has been embittered and thwarted by the exasperation felt by Spain at England holding a portion of their territory. In Spain there is a very high protective tariff, but I believe that if this thorn in the side of that country were removed we might easily have a very liberal treaty of commerce with her, by which every English production would be admitted upon moderate terms; and, moreover, I think you would long before this—I will not say have compelled, but have persuaded the Spanish Government to make effectual its laws against the traffic in negroes, thus putting an end to that abominable barbarity—the slave trade—between Africa and Cuba.

For those of us who believe that the Emperor of the French is a very dangerous neighbour, that he is a man of destiny, and that it is written in the Book of Fate that he is to do something dreadful to the Bank of England—to those who think that every Frenchman spends a portion of his time in looking across the Channel in the expectation that he will some day avenge Waterloo by traversing this country with the French eagle,—to all such—and I certainly am not among them—this argument ought to be one of force —namely, that if the English Government is anxious for an united Italy to be a counterpoise to France, surely it would also be a great advantage to us, in the same sense, to have a close ally and friend in Spain. That, however, you never can have, so long as you hold a portion of her territory, taken from her and kept from her under circumstances reflecting no honour upon England, especially when

it is almost universally admitted that the Rock is of no use whatever to ourselves. If England were to become more moral and more just, her influence among the nations would be largely increased, and it would no longer be possible for General Peel, Secretary for War under Lord Derby's Government, to tell his constituents at Huntingdon with truth that England is detested by every country in Europe.

There is only one other question to which I shall refer. I have heard that the working men of Birmingham have subscribed about 3,000*l.* towards the relief of their suffering countrymen in Lancashire. Well, that is a very honourable thing for Birmingham; and I am only sorry that every one of the men who thus nobly subscribed has not his name on your register of electors, and is not enabled to give his free vote at the poll for my hon. colleague and myself. In Lancashire there is now the strangest paralysis probably ever seen in any seat of industry. The American war was commenced—the one contending party refused to export cotton, and burnt not a little of it; the other blockaded the ports so that cotton should not escape. The result is that gradually the stocks of cotton have been consumed in this country and throughout the world, except that which remains in the United States, and what that quantity is nobody knows, with any pretence of accuracy. At the same time everybody believes that there is a large stock in the South. It is estimated variously at from 2,000,000 to 4,000,000 bales. I believe that whenever it comes it will turn out very much less than the higher estimate, but that stock being locked up in America, with prices at four times their ordinary rate, you can conceive how much the interests of all who are engaged in the cotton trade are concerned in the time when that stock shall be liberated. East India cotton, commonly called Surat, which sells ordinarily at from 3*d.* to 4*d.* per lb., now sells at or about 1*s.* 3*d.*, and American, which is ordinarily 6*d.* per lb., is now at more than 2*s.* A bale of

cotton, which used to cost 10*l.* or 12*l.*, now costs 50*l.* The advice of an armistice in America and the cessation of the war with a view to negotiation would produce a great fall and a great ruin; and the apprehension of this necessarily interferes very much with the course of business.

Now I complain of the official politicians of this country. Last Session there was a motion in the House of Lords against the blockade, and the Foreign Secretary made a speech in which he showed that the blockade was very effective, and he concluded his remarks in a very careless manner, as if he were really not thinking of what he was saying, by stating that he hoped in a few months the North would consent to the independence of the South, when, of course, this country would wish prosperity to both States. Well, what was the effect of this in Lancashire? Everybody there thinks a Foreign Secretary is a most profound statesman, and has everything written down in the Foreign Office; but on this question Lord Russell knew nothing, and that was exactly the position of all the rest of us. He was not, however, content with saying nothing; he said that which people in Lancashire hoped indicated that he knew a great deal. The consequence was that when the news reached the Exchange at Manchester everybody wanted to sell and no one wanted to buy. I know a man who was just then taking stock with a partner whom he was then about to leave, and the effect of that speech was, by a stroke of the pen, to depreciate his share of the business by more than 2,000*l.*

Again, there was a speech of Mr. Gladstone at Newcastle. I know the case of a man who, a week before, bought 300 bales of cotton in Liverpool, intending to work them up, calculating that he would be able to keep his mills going till Christmas. The moment he read the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech he sent word to his broker at Liverpool to sell his cotton instantly, and if he had kept it four or five days he would have lost a very large sum by it. On the delivery

of the same speech many persons in this country, to my knowledge, countermanded the orders they had previously sent out for the purchase of Indian cotton; and everybody knows that the state of the cotton-market in Manchester after that speech was almost as different as it is possible to conceive from what it was before it. Again, when the report of it reached India, it was put forth in the trade circulars of every Bombay house that the speech of Mr. Gladstone had created great uneasiness; and people abstained from buying because they thought prices would fall. Thus, the utterances of these men, who know no more about matters than any one of us, but who speak from their lofty position and with their supposed knowledge, have cost enormous sums to the county of Lancaster during the last twelve months, and they are not the only people to blame.

I wish to say a word about the London press. I, of course, don't speak of newspapers that have no force or influence;—the *Morning Herald* may rave, and the *Standard* may follow suit, but what they say will not alter the value of a pinch of snuff in any market in England. But it happens that there is a paper which, from its long existence, the energy with which it has been conducted, the good things which in times past it occasionally has done, and its alliance with certain influential sections, is accepted by some persons as an authority on great questions—on the Manchester or Liverpool Exchange. It may also be on your Exchange when it is built; people will rush to see what there is in the columns of *The Times*. Well, the columns of *The Times* have been filled with articles on America for two years, but, as I have said before, not one generous article with regard to the Free North has appeared in them. *The Times* may have what opinions it likes; its writers write under a mask. I do not propose, although I could do it, to tear that mask away; but it writes as a great power in the press of this country; for two years it has taken up its parable against the twenty millions of men

in the free States of North America, and has indulged in as many prophecies as Merlin himself, or anybody else of whom tradition gives us some account, but not one single prophecy up to this time has been fulfilled. There is not a man of the commercial class in Liverpool or Manchester who would not admit to-day, if he were asked, that the influence, and, if you like, the ignorance, or, if you wish to speak correctly, the malice of that paper towards the United States has produced disastrous consequences to very many persons in Lancashire. I know it, and it is universally known that there has been a constant teaching of the people that the war would come to an end, that there would be an armistice, that the North was exhausted, that bankruptcy was inevitable, that the recent elections would break down President Lincoln's Government, and that everything would happen that has not happened. The consequence was, that while the stock of cotton was constantly being diminished, there has been the greatest fear among all persons who have transactions in distant markets of doing any business in Manchester, and stocks of yarn and cloth have never risen in price at all in proportion to the price of the raw material. At this moment there are 400,000 bales of cotton in Liverpool; there is a very slight increase in the working of the mills, owing to the uncertainty in the minds of all buyers as to whether the high prices will be long sustained. Some of this uncertainty is, no doubt, the inevitable result of the state of circumstances. None of us can predict with any accuracy the duration of the war; but, surely, the inevitable uncertainty is bad enough, without being aggravated by the inconsiderate speeches of the Foreign Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or by the incessant folly and malice poured out from day to day in the leading columns of *The Times*. But I say that this course, besides doing no kind of good, is making an enemy of a great nation, and sacrificing interests which our statesmen ought zealously to guard.

Notwithstanding my complaint on this score, I am willing to admit that the world, even in our time, is moving on. Within the last two years we have seen two events which posterity will regard as very important. In Russia, serfdom has been put in the way of extinction by the act of the Emperor of Russia and his Government; in the United States, by the most wonderful series of events, there is evidently coming to pass that which no man dared hope for three years ago as likely to be approached during the lifetime of any one of us. I see from the East unto the West, from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, in spite of what misled, prejudiced, unjust, and wicked men may do, the cause of freedom still moving onward; and it is not in human power to arrest its progress,

> 'For God from evil still educes good,
> And freedom's seed still grows, tho' steeped in blood.'

And coming back to our own country from this review, I should say there is much to be done here; and in this observation—I speak to members of your Chamber who are not of any one political party—there are gentlemen here who, even if they give me credit for honesty and conscientiousness in my course, yet think me mistaken and dangerous in the propositions which I make to my fellow countrymen; but being here, as we are, of various political parties, may I not say thus much, that if we were to shun party spirit, if we were to examine questions fairly and carefully, if we were to endeavour to decide them truthfully, we might have hope that we should do much to elevate our people, to improve our institutions, to make broader and safer the foundations of our freedom, and to build up and preserve a commonwealth which should do much to help forward the advancement of the world.

II.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 29, 1864.

[On the evening of this day Mr. Bright attended a soirée in the Assembly Room of Nock's Hotel. The audience was necessarily small, between two and three hundred. The following address was delivered in answer to a motion of Mr. William Morgan, which called on the audience to recognise 'the patriotic labours of the members for the borough.' Mr. Scholefield, Mr. Bright's colleague, was unable to be present. Mr. Sturge, the eminent Birmingham philanthropist, is alluded to in p. 20. The speech was intended to be a familiar comment on the past history and the present interests of the Reformed Parliament.]

I AM afraid that I cannot in such graceful language as would have been heard from the lips of my colleague, had he been present, express my pleasure at the company of the ladies who have been kind enough to join our party to-night. I can say with the greatest truth, that I rejoice on this, as I have on many other occasions, to see them exhibiting an interest in the progress of political questions. It has not only been common, as Mr. Dale has said, to create the impression that what are called serious people should not meddle with politics, but that these public questions were entirely out of the field in which women should exercise themselves. I venture, not diffidently, but confidently, to differ from any such opinion, and to say that politics, by

which we understand the science of legislation and government, have a very direct and constant influence upon the happiness of every family in every country where there is a government, and that, therefore, what is done under the form of political action can by no means be indifferent to the mothers, and wives, and sisters, and daughters of England.

I have had the pleasure of meeting, whilst I have been in Birmingham, a gentleman who I suppose, though I have not been told it, does not generally act with our political party, and after much conversation, and after I had told him that some time when I came to Birmingham I would speak on a particular question, he said he should be very glad if some time or other I would make a speech on the bright side of England. You understand, I dare say, the sort of sarcasm there was in that suggestion. I suppose that as he does not agree with me on all subjects, he thought I took too gloomy a view of the position and prospects of this country. Now, you will admit that there are a great number of speakers and a great number of writers whose business it seems always to persuade everybody that everybody is well treated and perfectly happy—and they advise their hearers or readers to avoid the errors of the French on the one hand, and the mistakes of the people of America on the other. But if everybody was contented and happy, and there was nothing that it was our business to reform, I should stay at home. I have no fondness for political meetings and platform work, and I should not for the last twenty years have given the whole of my time to public questions if nothing was necessary but to come before an audience and to rejoice with each other at the glorious position we occupy. It is the very existence of grievances which calls me from the quiet of my own home, from the pursuit of my own business, and from attention to my own family; and whenever I find that there is nothing for me to do but to say, 'What a happy people we are, and how delightful it is to be

under the Government of Lord Palmerston and his Whig colleagues,' then I assure you I will not trouble you with saying it, but I shall leave you to find it out, and I shall stay at home.

But still there is a bright side to the aspect of England, and you may see some of it probably by looking forward, and you may see a good deal of it on looking backward. But the bright side of the history of this country, so long as I have been permitted to take any part in it, is that side in which are delineated the changes that have taken place —the changes which I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have supported—the changes which no doubt many of those who would wish me to speak on in a different tone have to the utmost of their power opposed. I was thinking since I came into the room what these changes were. I own to feeling that I have been what I may call trapped into a speech to-night, for I thought we were coming here for a conversational meeting; that there would be no tables and very few forms, and that we should walk about the room and make ourselves acquainted with each other, and have some tea and coffee and conversation; but I find that the managers of the meeting have disposed otherwise, and I was informed that I was expected to make a speech. Well, one cannot make a speech without thinking something of what is to be said, and since I came to this building I have been thinking as to what these changes are which many of us recollect, and which to my mind form the bright side of English history, at least as far as it is to be found in our lifetime. Most of us can remember thirty or thirty-five years ago, and if there be any gentleman who complains of the tone of my speeches in general, I would ask him to bear in mind what are the changes that have been made, and if he can, to measure the results upon the prosperity and upon the happiness of this country.

The first great measure which suggests itself to me is that

which gave the right of Parliamentary representation to the whole nation of Ireland, being the Catholic population of that country. Up to the year 1829, no person professing or holding the Christian religion as it is held by the Roman Catholic Church was permitted to sit in the House of Commons. There were at that time, I suppose, five millions, or very nearly of Roman Catholics in Ireland, but they were not allowed to send to the House of Commons any man agreeing with them in religious opinions. It is within the recollection of many of us that it required an agitation of a most formidable character, led on by one of the most remarkable men that Ireland has ever produced—the late Mr. O'Connell—to obtain the concession of that right; and bear in mind that it was fiercely opposed by a very powerful body in this country, and there is a party in this country even yet that regrets that the concession was ever made. Therefore, although it may be said that we are in a sense a free country, yet thirty-five years ago five millions of Catholics in Ireland, and, perhaps, nearly one million in England, were shut out altogether from representation, from being able to return any man of their own religious sentiments to Parliament. Every one of them was prevented from becoming a candidate for a seat in Parliament; and therefore, as regards this particular, this was not then a free country.

The next great step which was made was that in which Birmingham took so distinguished a part. It is not certain, I think, but, looking back, we may have some doubt whether the Reform Bill would have been carried at the time it was if it had not been for the strenuous and patriotic efforts of the inhabitants of this great town. The body which has always opposed, and does always oppose every step in advance, ran the country to within twenty-four hours of a revolution before they conceded that measure. And when it was conceded it was so mutilated, so much changed from the original proposition, and on the whole

though so great, was yet so inefficient, that we look upon it now as leaving the representation of the country in a very unsatisfactory state. Now, after that bill had passed, as was natural after so great an agitation, there was a powerful swell of Liberal opinion throughout the country, which did not satisfy itself by the passing of that bill, but carried other measures of great importance. One of them was the bill by which all the corporations in the towns and cities of the kingdom, with one or two exceptions, were reformed. Up to that time there was no real representation in scarcely any town in the kingdom, but some half-a-dozen, or a dozen, or two dozen men, self-elected or elected by some landed proprietor or some lord of the manor, were the municipal authorities. Such were the governors of your town, and formed your Corporation, and the corruption was of a character so foul that the odour of it remains in our nostrils even to this day. Now, although corporations are by no means centres of absolute wisdom—I say that of course with great trepidation—in the presence of your worthy Mayor and others who surround him; yet I think it must be acknowledged that the passing of that bill and the reform of these corporations has been an enormous advantage to this country: and I only hope that corporations generally will become much more expensive than they have been—not expensive in the sense of wasting money, but that there will be such nobleness and liberality amongst the people of our towns and cities, as will lead them to give their corporations power to expend more money on those things which, as public opinion advances, are found to be essential to the health and comfort and improvement of our people.

About the time when that celebrated measure passed there passed another still more celebrated, because it affected not England alone but the opinion of the world, and excited emotion in the mind of every good man in every country, and stirred in him, I believe, a lasting admiration for the

wisdom and magnanimity of the English people. I speak of the measure which emancipated 800,000 slaves in the colonies of England, and did even more than emancipate 800,000 slaves, for it set an example which the world could not but follow. You may rely upon it that from this great act is to be dated to a large extent the creation of that conscientious feeling in England which has been growing from that day to this; while it is owing to the unteachable spirit of the slaveholders of another country that a great nation has been brought into the throes of a fearful revolution, out of which I trust not only will that nation itself be purified, but that 4,000,000 of slaves will be free. And whilst this passes through my mind, I cannot help for a moment touching upon the fact that one of your citizens now no more, my personal and intimate friend, was one of the most eminent of those who endeavoured to stir the conscience of the English people to that great act of justice; and I never pass, as I do often pass when I come here, that memorable figure of him which you have erected in one of the most conspicuous places in your town, without hoping that every citizen of Birmingham when he comes to consider public questions, whether regarding this country or that other country to which reference has already been made, and where that great struggle is being carried on, will endeavonr to be animated by the disinterested, the noble, and the Christian spirit by which your late eminent townsman was distinguished.

There is another law to which I might refer, but it is not of the same character, though no doubt it has been productive in some cases of great advantage—I mean the law which was passed for reforming the administration of the relief of the poor throughout this country. That law was subjected, I believe, to greater assault than almost any other law, and this for a long time after it was enacted. It had features in it that seemed harsh, and unfortunately its administration was entrusted to the hands of men who seemed to wish to make it as unpalatable

as possible. Notwithstanding, I am free to say that, looking back at it as a measure, I believe it to be one which did credit to the Whig administration of the day—to their courage, and to their legislative and administrative capacity. I mention it, therefore, as one of those changes which I believe have given satisfaction to the country, and which have passed during the time which I am now sketching. Well then, after that we came to a very quiet, and, I may say, unsatisfactory time. The Whigs had settled comfortably into their places. They, I believe, have a motto, which they have not publicly announced. It is this—'A place for every man, and every man in his place.' That means, of course, every man of their own respectable party. Well, at this time they became very much indisposed to go further, and the satisfaction of the country with them was considerably diminished. Their majorities in Parliament were reduced, and, finally, they came to a general election in the year 1841—but nine years after the passage of that great measure of Reform. They were thrown out of office by the constituencies, and Parliament re-opened with a majority against them of a little under a hundred votes. At this time there came another great change in the State—the adoption of the principle of Free Trade. This question was brought before the public very much in consequence of the sufferings which arose from the bad harvests that we had immediately before that general election. It took from the year 1838 to the year 1846 to bring about the great change of the abolition of the Corn Law. Parliament was elected in 1841 with a majority of ninety pledged to oppose the abolition of the law. Sir Robert Peel was the great leader of that great party, and as these men found themselves in Parliament with this enormous majority they looked down with contempt upon all who were moving in that question, and considered that they were absolutely sure to maintain the law and to maintain their places. The result shows how much is to be done by continuous

and disinterested labour on behalf of a great cause, and by appealing to the sympathies of the whole nation. In 1846, partly at that moment owing no doubt to the failure of the harvest and the difficulties which threatened from an impending famine in Ireland, this vast majority melted away. Men who had pledged themselves in every form of language to their constituents in 1841, who had attended meetings opposed to Free-trade, subscribed to newspapers which opposed it, found their whole power melting away, and their leader himself converted to the necessity of a change; and the change took place, a change so great that there were members of both Houses of Parliament, and I believe a majority of the House of Lords, who believed that to them at least the world was brought nearly to an end. I recollect that a lady—a relative of mine—sat below the bar of the House of Lords on the night when the Corn Law Repeal Bill was read a second time. It was very late—or rather early in the morning—when the division was approaching, and a lady sitting near her, who was a connection of some peer, spoke with him as he came from the House, and she said, 'How will it go?' It was just before the division, and, pointing up to the clock, as it were in an agony of excitement, he said, 'In twenty minutes'—or in some number of minutes which it would take to go to a division—'we shall be no better than dead men.' Well, now, the Corn Law was abolished, and if they had not told the farmers—those poor terrified farmers, and landlords still more terrified—I am not sure that any of them would ever have found it out. The country would have found that it was much better off, and the people would have discovered that by some power the force of which they could not perhaps understand, loaves of bread and provisions to the amount of more than twenty millions sterling per annum had been deposited in their homes for the sustenance and enjoyment of their families, and they would scarcely have known how it was brought about. But we know

that it was brought about by the repealing of a single Act of Parliament. It was not by a number of benevolent ladies and gentlemen forming societies all over the country and giving people alms, but it was by repealing the Corn Law—by a simple act of justice, an act that was so just that I have never heard a man, or have scarcely heard a man deny its justice, except on something which they call political considerations, which means that there were political reasons why that great act of justice should not be done. I recollect that a pious banker whom I happened to be travelling with in the North of England, admitted that it was very unjust that there should be a law to make food scarce and dear, but said, 'I accept it because I believe it necessary to maintain the hereditary aristocracy of this country.' And further, he said that he thought that our greatness in the eye of the world depended very much upon the maintenance of the wealth and power and the display of the aristocracy of England. That is exactly the sort of reason which people give. Weak-minded men are taken by reasons of this kind, and they give you reasons now that are not a bit better for opposition to many changes which wiser men wish to promote, and which doubtless by-and-by will be effected. And then results will show that the reasons of those who have opposed them were just as silly and just as little worth as those of my fellow-traveller the pious banker.

But that question of the corn law was not all, there was the question of sugar. In 1840—it is not very long ago—the single article of sugar in this country cost—by reason of the monopoly—not less than six millions sterling more than it would have cost if you could have bought it freely in the market of the world, while the fall of the corn monopoly, which was the keystone of the arch, let everything belonging to it and supported by it down. The sugar monopoly fell, and I do not now know how much more. One was connected with the supply of timber from abroad; and another, still

more important, was the monopoly which our shipowners had, and the abolition of which has been found to be injurious, I believe, to nobody, and greatly advantageous to the whole country. When all this was done the course was perfectly easy, for our Chancellor of the Exchequer has had nothing but driving down hill since that time. Once we had a tariff, that upon which Sir Robert Peel began his reform, with 1000—I am not sure that there were not 1200 items on which duties were raised at the ports, some of them articles which, when the names were read off in the House of Commons, raised a general laugh, for people turned to each other and asked what they were. There were things so minute that nobody in the House had ever heard of, and yet they were articles upon which duties were levied. Then the tariff was simplified until now there are perhaps only twelve or fifteen articles upon which duties are levied. All other things can come freely into the country; we have made a very great clearance, and the result has been that we have obtained fiscal reforms which are more comprehensive and more just to the country than probably have ever been made in the same time by any other Government in any country in the world. I do not think those who were most active in promoting these changes were regarded by certain people with much more confidence than before. But the changes were made and they worked well for the nation.

We may now come down to one or two other topics, one of them the question of the treaty with France. We were taught when we were children—I was born just before the termination of that monstrous and wicked war which was so long carried on with France—at any rate, the school-books of those days were filled with charges against the French people. The representations on the stage, I am told by those who frequented theatres at the time, were to the same effect, and there was a general feeling that there was some risk to Englishmen if they became too well acquainted with

the French, and if by any possibility they should learn to believe that the French were not the natural enemies of Englishmen. Well, my friend Mr. Cobden—who as you know is occasionally mentioned with very abusive language by several of the great instructors of the press—thought that the Emperor of the French and some persons who are occasionally consulted by him would be very glad to have more intimate relations with the people of this country, and he went over to Paris. He saw the Emperor, and discussed the matter with him. He found the Emperor most willing, and not only most willing, but most anxious that the people of the two countries should be introduced to each other through the medium of extended commerce, and that his object was—for I heard him say it—that the people being thus united together it should not be in the power of rulers and statesmen to induce them hereafter to enter into those dreadful struggles which, now we look back upon them, we can say have for centuries disfigured the history of the two nations. Now, there is another fact which ought to have some interest, but which I shall merely mention, that it was not—and I was glad to see it noticed by Mr. Milner Gibson at Ashton the other day—it was not one of your official diplomatists who effected that treaty, it was done solely by my friend Mr. Cobden, who, as the cricketers would say, got it entirely off his own bat: and I venture to say that as long as the history of England and France is read it will be read of him, that he, a simple citizen of this country, interested in its welfare, interested in peace between France and England, interested in the spread of great and enlightened principles and commerce throughout the world, that he went over to Paris, and there negotiated with the Emperor of the French a treaty, which I believe is the most important document of the kind that has ever been signed by the rulers of any two nations in Europe.

From this I pass to the last of these reforms that I shall touch upon, and that is to another kind of freedom, in which no persons in Parliament were more actively engaged than Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. Cobden, and myself, that is, the freedom of the press. You pay a penny for your admirable newspaper in this town, and when doing so you are not conscious, perhaps, of what happened only a very short time ago. The paper on which it was printed, say ten years ago, had a stamp of a penny upon it, the paper itself did not cost probably more than a halfpenny, and, therefore, there was over 100 or perhaps 200 per cent. of taxation upon the paper before our friend Mr. Jaffray could touch it. Well then—I am not speaking now of the stamp—there was also a tax of, at one time, threepence, and at another time three-halfpence per pound upon paper itself at the paper-mill. This unfortunate article seemed to be thought the greatest of all nuisances and trespassers. The moment it was made out of the meanest rags and rubbish, the Chancellor of the Exchequer put a tax upon it of three-halfpence per pound: and the moment it was sent to the newspaper office, unless the manufacturer had already done it, the proprietor must send it to the Government office to have a stamp of a penny put upon it; and when he ran it through his machine and printed the columns of letter-press, if he put in a short paragraph that a cook wanted a place, or that anybody wanted a tutor, although it was only three words or only one word, it was an advertisement, and for every one of these he must pay a tax of 1*s.* 6*d.* to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The newspapers were, as you know, not very long ago many times the price that they are at present. People said then that we had a free press. We denied it, and we asserted that unless the Chancellor of the Exchequer would undertake really to free the newspaper press there was not a single thing else that he undertook to do which we would not oppose. Therefore, by getting the Chancellor of the

Exchequer into a difficulty of this nature, and by absolutely insisting upon an act of justice, we used the skill and ingenuity with which Mr. Gibson conducted that question in Parliament to obtain what we desired. Now, what has followed? We have a gentleman so eminent as the Speaker of the House of Commons, the other day, at a meeting, expressing himself in terms of the very highest commendation and admiration of the penny newspapers in this country. But what did all the people say who opposed us? They said first of all, 'You will steal everything from the *Times*.' Well, I do not think anything else could by possibility make a paper so bad as stealing everything from the *Times*. I recollect the prophecies of the *Globe* newspaper, which I believe values itself at 4*d*. or 5*d*., while other papers quite as good and as large are selling for a penny. The *Globe* newspaper declared that these cheap papers would do nothing but crib paragraphs and news from the respectable press, which they would not acknowledge. Why, the *Globe* newspaper itself is made up almost entirely of 'scissor-work,' and I have seen in it little paragraphs which it has copied from the penny press of the morning, and which it has copied without acknowledgment. I venture then to say that every prophecy of the opponents of a free press, so far, has failed; and that whether it be in quality of writing, in elevated and moral tone, in the industry with which facts and news are collected and offered to the people, I believe that the newspapers which are sold at a penny will bear comparison with any of their dearer neighbours, and that there is but one opinion throughout the whole kingdom—except it be in the mind of some particular man who never could find out anything himself, and never could be taught anything by others,—there is, I say, but one opinion as to the inestimable benefit which the freedom of the press has conferred upon this country. Is it not a very curious thing that every one of the things I have mentioned is now almost

by general consent admitted to have been a just and beneficial change? You can hardly find a Tory now. It is a blessed thing, but somehow or other, either the Tories die off, or they change themselves, or they do certainly take a little different colour. You can hardly find any of them now but will admit that a great number of these changes—some will admit that all of them—have been wise changes, and beneficial to the country. And yet it is very odd that the very same men at this moment set up to be authorities in politics. They opposed every one of these changes, they have obstructed every one to the extent of their power, they have told you at every step that every change was destructive to the best interests of the country, and they have rushed to the poll with what I should call a frantic blindness of patriotism to put off the good day when these beneficial changes should take effect. And having been wrong in every single thing for twenty-five years back—and if they have lived as long, for fifty years back—at this very moment, without a blush, without the slighest appearance of difficulty or embarrassment, they will call upon a constituency now to believe that they are the men, and that wisdom will die with them. If there had been no violent party spirit, if these men would have given themselves, if they were capable of it, to some intelligent thought on these questions, is it not very likely that many of these changes might have been made at an earlier period, and that the public might have had, say for twenty years, the advantage of these reforms, which owing to the obstinacy of opponents they have only enjoyed, it may be, for five or ten years? I suppose there are not many of this class of gentlemen here—or else I might try to improve the occasion, and see if I could not reach—reach, as the preachers say—their intellect and their conscience. There are other questions to which these men might turn their minds if they liked, unless they have been so long standing still, that, like a weather-vane, they have become rusted, and cannot turn at all.

There is a question that has been discussed of late years, and that will come on again for urgent discussion before long —the question of Parliamentary Reform. It is thirty years or more since the Reform Bill passed. It was not a good bill, though it was a great bill when it passed; and to show you how insufficient it was, I have already mentioned that in nine years after it passed, so entirely had the old governing class recovered from its fall, that it entered Parliament in 1841 with a majority of ninety. And when we know that it leaves an immense number of small boroughs that are assailable and open to management, and that it leaves the county constituency as it now is, in many counties entirely in the hands of three or four or half a dozen landed proprietors, and that it shuts out the great body of the people from the franchise everywhere, it is not to be wondered at that we should have found ourselves, nine years after the passing of the Reform Bill, in a minority in the House of Commons, and at this moment in a position, when nobody seems to know exactly whether there is a majority or a minority. What has taken place since 1832? Surely, nearly all the changes I have mentioned. What else has taken place? Not these changes only, and not those changes only which Mr. Wright has said have taken place in Birmingham, but similar changes all over the kingdom. Have not your schools extended to a great degree? have not the habits of industry and frugality become more prominent? is not the country more peaceful? is not the law generally better observed? and are not magistrates and all men in authority held in better regard than they were thirty or forty years ago? Don't we all feel that there is a more kind, generous, merciful, and just spirit spread amongst the people, and animating great masses of them? And unless we are prepared to say that the English Constitution is not a Constitution by which representative Government is favoured; that we have no right to a share in the administration of the affairs of our country, but that a small, a powerful, and a rich class acting upon a small portion

of the middle class, and banded so that their influence becomes almost irresistible, should appropriate the Constitution; and that the Government shall be handed over to them for the furthering of their special purposes—unless we are prepared to say this, we have no right to call ourselves free men living in a free country—unless we determine before long that there shall be another substantial measure of reform.

The other night I referred to the question of emigration from this country. I am told, though I have not seen it in print, that a newspaper, which does not care to improve its character by being fair to those whom it judges, declared that I put myself up as an advertising agent for the American Government. Let me tell you that the advertising agents, the practical advertising agents to the American Government, are those who refuse to do justice to the English people. Mr. Bancroft, the best historian of his country, has declared in words that Europe should never forget that the history of the colonisation of America is the history of the crimes of Europe. We know perfectly well how it was that those noble men who colonised New England—and whose spirit yet lives on that continent, and is now, I will venture to say, directing the energies of the American Government in the preservation of their Union, and in the establishment of freedom from the pole to the gulf—first settled in that country. We know that those men were driven from this country by the oppressions of despotic monarchs and of an insolent Church. And we know that from that time to this there have landed in the United States millions of persons—who have emigrated from the United Kingdom, the largest portion of them from Ireland. I have said before, and it is well to say it on every suitable occasion, that such has been the conduct of the Government of England to the people of Ireland, that wherever the Irishman plants his foot in any foreign land, having quitted for ever his native soil, there he stands as an enemy of England, whom nothing can reconcile to this

country. But if the Government of England in Ireland had been a just Government, if it had been just even since the time of the Union, sixty years ago, all that hostile feeling might have been cleared away long since, and Irishmen would have been as loyal and contented as any class of Englishmen. And if they had found it necessary from any cause to transport themselves to the United States, you would have found in the United States the feeling that they had not been driven by injustice from their native land, but that turning back to that land with the loving, longing gaze of patriots, they might have said—

> "Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> This is my own, my native land?"

But now—now under the feelings created by a long course of misgovernment, continued from father to son, directed against their social, their political, and their religious feeling, there is hardly an Irishman in the United States who is not the victim of any man who chooses to make political capital by exciting hostility against England. There can be no just government of Ireland until you abolish the Irish Protestant Church. There have been no feelings in the history of the world that have so stirred men's love, and so stirred their hate, as the feelings connected with their religious belief. There was never an act at once so unjust and so unwise as that of the English Government when it maintained a Church in Ireland that never could call within its fold more than about one-tenth of the whole people, and which from the day of its establishment to this has probably never been able to convert—I was going to say, a single real Catholic to Protestantism—but which, having found Catholicism a belief of the people, has made it also a patriotism. For every Catholic has not only had the ordinary reasons for adhering to his Church which every man has who learns the doctrines and teachings of his religion from his mother, but he has this further reason—that the Church

which is sought to be imposed upon him is imposed upon him by another nation, and, to him, by an alien Government. And, therefore, every feeling of reverence for God, and every feeling of self-respect which he has as a free man, makes him resolve that he never will come within the pale of such a Church as that.

And, now, but one more matter, which it would be wrong to pass by at this moment. This is the situation of foreign affairs, and the doctrine of non-intervention. The people of England must, and will before long, make up their minds on this great question—whether they will accept the doctrine of non-intervention in its entirety and completeness, or whether they will allow it when it is convenient, and repudiate it when their passions have been a little stirred. Bear in mind that one of two eminent Ministers of the present Cabinet certainly was in office as long ago as some years before I was born. He comes down, then, from a generation that is almost passed away. Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister, is that man. Lord Russell, though not so old, also goes back into that early time. They are both naturally—I am not imputing it to them as a crime, because, possibly, it was what they could not help—but they naturally have been saturated with those theories and doctrines upon the question of non-intervention and foreign affairs which prevailed near the beginning of this century, and they may fancy in their old age that what was taught them and practised in their youth is right now, and was right during the time of the Italian war, I mean the war between Austria and France, in which, it is thought, Italy gained much in the direction of liberty. I went one day in the session of Parliament during which these events occurred to spend an hour with the late Lord Aberdeen. He had been Prime Minister, and Foreign Secretary for many years. He was a man of very sound judgment, of great moderation, and of many good qualities, which his political opponents did not always give him credit for. He spoke

about the war which was then beginning between the French and the Austrians, and he said that when he was young there was not a statesman in England of any party who would have hesitated for one single moment to go into that war on the side of Austria against France, with the view of preventing the increase of French influence in Italy and in Europe. But he said that he hoped, and he thought it was probably true, that statesmen had grown wiser since that time. Well, we did not go into the war in Italy; our Government did not take sides with Austria, nor yet with France. The people generally, I think, were rather in favour of France, because they thought that France was in favour of freedom in Italy. But, suppose these statesmen of the old time, of Lord Aberdeen's youth, had carried out their principles and had gone into that war, it is difficult to see that things would have been any better than they now are in Italy; it is not difficult to see that probably they would have been much worse, and that no doubt thousands of our fellow-countrymen might have been lying in their graves on the continent of Europe; that great sea-fights might have taken place with great destruction; that the French Treaty certainly would not have existed, and that the harmony which now exists between the peoples of these two great nations might have been intercepted for many years. I won't go back to the Russian war; you know the part I took in regard to that. I have on my part to thank it for only one thing, and that is, that it is owing I believe to the part I took in that question that I now stand here in this borough as one of your Parliamentary representatives. But, how were you dragged, or beguiled, or excited into that war? By the impulse of these two aged ministers. They could not keep themselves out of it. I am not imputing to them other than honourable motives, but saturated as they were—I say saturated —with the doctrines of a by-gone time, a time, I hope, never to return, they fancied it was the duty of this small island to take

care of a rotten Government, and of a country devastated by the oppressions and excesses of that Government. The result was that amongst the various contending nations, at least four hundred thousand men's lives were sacrificed, and probably more than as many millions of treasure were thrown entirely away; and instead of the affairs of Europe being settled on a permanent basis—that is always their cry—you find that the affairs of Europe at this moment are not settled on a permanent basis, and that Europe has doubled the armed men and doubled the military expenditure that it had before that war.

And now we come to another topic, and that is the question between Denmark and Germany. I am one of those, I hope, who sympathise even with men who wear crowns when they are in trouble, and the difficulty which has overtaken the King of Denmark does not appear to have been a difficulty of his own seeking. There has been a difficulty for many years with regard to those Duchies. It is not yet settled, though perhaps it may be settled. But I do not know, I doubt extremely whether anything that England could do by sending 25,000 men into Schleswig, and by putting a fleet in the North Sea, or the Baltic, or Adriatic, would permanently settle that question. You may rely upon this, that questions of that nature are only permanently settled when they are brought to a conclusion by those alone who are deeply interested in them. We are not deeply interested in this question—I do not mean interested in the sense of the Prince of Wales marrying a daughter of the King of Denmark. I think nothing would be more unfortunate than that, whilst the members of the Royal Family are not allowed to marry from English citizens, they should, in marrying abroad, therefore embroil Englishmen in the quarrels of foreign countries. I can imagine nothing more likely to make Englishmen doubt whether Royal alliances can have any pleasant interest to them than if such a course is taken. We see it reported in the papers that the Guards have had

orders, and that the fleet is to come to some place or other. These, I fancy, are mostly at present paragraphs put out as feelers or paragraphs of bluster, intended to operate upon Austria or Prussia. But I cannot understand the object of Austria and Prussia, unless it is that they are afraid of a revolution in Germany, and are therefore taking a lead in great operations which may save them from any unpleasant change which may be impending. But if I were speaking to members of her Majesty's Government, I should remind them of this, that in 1853–4 there were members of that Government who talked of peace, and for peace. In Mr. Gladstone's speech at Manchester the burden was a hearty wish for peace, and peace doubtless was the wish of the Queen and the Prince. And yet the Government went into war. They take steps which they fancy do not mean war, but they are gradually brought nearer and nearer to the verge of it, and then under some pretence that they have gone so far that they cannot honourably retreat, they plunge over into the abyss. On that occasion I believe there were members of the Cabinet who had not the slightest idea that they were going into war.

And that leads me to speak about a curious custom of the Cabinet on which the people generally are ignorant, but concerning which I now feel it my duty to inform them. When a Government is made, a list is drawn up of about thirteen gentlemen who are to form a Cabinet, and who are summoned to the meetings of the Cabinet. But there is an inner Cabinet, and it is generally compounded of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and occasionally one other Minister. While Lord Derby was a member of Sir Robert Peel's Cabinet, he knew nothing whatever of a most important memorandum or understanding which had been drawn up on an agreement come to between Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Wellington, and the late Emperor Nicholas of Russia. Until he came to be Prime Minister he had never

seen that memorandum, and never knew of its existence. Well, I have been told that there was an attempt made when Lord Derby's Government was formed to keep the whole of that interior Cabinet in the hands of himself and Lord Malmesbury, the Foreign Minister, but that a certain other Minister, who knew the responsibility which attaches to the deliberations of such an inner Cabinet, would have nothing to do with the responsibility of its great decisions unless he were made acquainted with all the facts and with everything belonging to them. And, therefore, the secret Cabinet in Lord Derby's Government was composed of three, and not of two members. But take this present Cabinet. I will undertake to say, by what I know of what has been done on past occasions, that a great deal of the most delicate business of foreign affairs is conducted almost entirely by Lord Palmerston and Lord Russell. Do not let me be supposed to insinuate that Lord Palmerston has not had a most lengthened experience in foreign affairs, and do not let me be supposed to say that Lord Russell is not anxious to have the affairs of the country transacted in such a way as he thinks will best serve the interests of the nation. But there may be members of that Cabinet at this moment who are not aware of the steps that are being taken from day to day, of despatches that are being written, of suggestions that are being thrown out, and of resolutions that are partly come to, and which being once arrived at and determined upon by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, will plunge the country in war. If there be any member of that Cabinet who is not in that secret knowledge, and he finds that these matters are advancing towards war, let me beseech him, as he values the price of his conscience during his lifetime, and his reputation also with his fellow-men, which is of much less real value, that he will take care to know everything that is done, that he will not be made the partner, it may be in great errors, it may be in great crimes, which he and his

country, if the war should come, may have occasion to regret. I have not seen a paper written out of London which argues in favour of war, and I do not think the London press generally has yet stimulated the country to violent action. But let us here—we, the people everywhere—have our eyes wide open at this moment, and by every means in our power show that, while we are willing to sympathise with any monarch, it may be, or any state under any difficulties of any kind, we also consider it our duty in the present and future interest of the people of these islands to show in addition that, looking over our past history for the last two hundred years, we have come to the fixed determination that the power of England shall not be exerted, the blood of England shall not be spilt, the wealth created by the toils of Englishmen shall not be squandered, except it be in some great cause in which the solid and permanent interests of this country are engaged.

I fear you will think I have been preaching you a too long political sermon. I wish this to be a free country—not to be afraid of anything that is good because they say it is French, or of something good because they say it is American, or to stand by something that is clearly evil because they say it is old. A very eminent writer, not long ago, said that England to a large extent was still as it were fettered in the grave-clothes of the middle ages. But we have a competition to run with other nations, and, most of all, with that nation which is now distracted and in the throes of a great Civil War. We have also within our shores, and within the limits of these islands, a great and a noble people. We have within us the elements of a nation far greater in the future than anything that has been in the past, even in the most renowned and glorious days. We can set ourselves free from the prejudices and from the darkness of the past. We can give to our people education, we can open up to them new sources of industry, we can reduce the expenditure of our Government,

we can invite another million or two of our people within the pale of the constitution, and taking them, we can ask counsel of them that we may assist each other in the wise government of this great nation. All this we can do, and all that is wanted is that in working out our political problems we should take for our foundation that which recommends itself to our conscience as just and moral. I have not the slightest regard for that statesmanship which is divorced from the morality which we say ought to guide us in our private life, which we gather for a nation as for individuals from the religion which we profess. Time, persistent labour, fidelity to the great principles which we hold and believe in, will certainly give us the victory over existing evils, as similar qualities and similar conduct have given the victories which I have described to you in the observations I have made.

III.

ROCHDALE, DECEMBER 23, 1867.

[On November 26, 1867, Mr. Jacob Bright was returned for the city of Manchester, by a majority of 1800 over Alderman Bennett; the third candidate, Mr. Mitchell Henry, having practically withdrawn. The number polled for Mr. Bright was greater than had ever been recorded in Manchester for any candidate before, though it is remarkable that the proposer of Mr. Bennett disclaimed the notion that his candidate was 'a Conservative.' On Dec. 23, 1867, a meeting was held in the New Theatre at Rochdale, with the view of congratulating Mr. Jacob Bright on his election.]

THE first object of this meeting is doubtless to congratulate my—shall I say fortunate or unfortunate—brother on his initiation into the perils, the difficulties, and the disappointments of Parliamentary life. But as I shall probably not be considered capable of dealing with that question impartially, I shall advance a little beyond this subject and say that we are met for the purpose of congratulating our fellow-countrymen who are members of the constituency of the city of Manchester, that they have by their recent choice restored that city to its rightful position as regards the great Liberal party of the kingdom. Looking back but a few years to what happened in Manchester, and remembering how far I was connected with it, I may be forgiven if I take more than a common interest in what has recently been transacted. I have always known that popular constituencies are in some

respects very much like individuals, they are liable occasionally to fickleness and to error, and to what may be termed aberration from a straight course; but there is a consolation in knowing that while in political warfare we meet necessarily with great changes—now with a great reverse, and now with a great triumph—yet in that respect we of the Liberal party differ most essentially from those whom I would call our friends, if they were not so constantly our opponents. I mean the Tory party. Our disasters, which are by no means unfrequent, and which sometimes give us great grief, are always followed at no distant period by a corresponding triumph; whereas with our Tory friends a disaster is generally final and irreversible. Their policy and their principles, when once overthrown by the advancing intelligence of the people, are buried, and they hope for no resurrection. But there is one thing even in connexion with these events on which we may congratulate them; for as we know that the rain falls upon the just and upon the unjust, so we know that our opponents of the Tory party share fully with us the spoils and the advantages which the nation derives from our victories over them.

A very distinguished Frenchwoman, Madame de Staël, left on record her definition of what she understood by the word 'happiness.' She said that happiness consisted in constant occupation for a desirable object and with a sense of continual progress. Well, if that be so, I think we may consider ourselves, politically speaking at any rate, as among the happiest of mortals, for we have a constant occupation. The end we seek is not only desirable in the ordinary use of that term, but it is, as we believe, good in the highest degree; and whether we look backwards or forwards, to the past or to the future, I think we have attendant upon us constantly a sense of continual progress. Our friends the Tories unhappily are in a very different position. They have had a full and constant employment, for during the last twenty-five years

we have found them a great deal to do; but, as the result has shown from year to year, and even from generation to generation, they have no desirable end in view, as they themselves find out in time. And more than that, whether they look backwards or forwards, it is utterly impossible that any one of them, except the mere seeker for some office, can have any feeling that he has aided in any continual progress, unless it be that sort of progress which in this neighbourhood is called a progress backwards.

Just look back for a moment so far as the year 1832. You will remember how the Tories were alarmed—almost to mental distraction—at the thought of the passing of the Reform Bill of that year. Go forward to fourteen years—to the year 1846—and call to mind, if you can, the things that were spoken by most eminent speakers, that were written by crowds of writers for the press, believed in, it may be, by thousands upon thousands of the people, as to the tremendous and appalling consequences which would spring from allowing the people of this country to have free access to unlimited supplies of food grown in other countries. Remember the state of feeling into which those unfortunate Tories were plunged by that prospect. Now come down to the present year, 1867. Is it possible that all can be untrue which has been said by them as to the disasters that would arise if ever a moderate measure for the suffrage were forced through or granted by Parliament? Think of that unfortunate party—I am not speaking of the leaders—they make it profitable enough; they know very well what they are doing; they, many of them, understand these questions just as well and as much as we understand them; but I speak of the Tory party in the country, who are the pawns and other chessmen with which these leaders play their game. Only imagine, and if you can imagine, it will only be to excite your commiseration, how these men have been misled from time to time, how they have been alarmed, how they

have striven as if for life against the very things that were most calculated to do them good; how they have spent time and money; how they have squandered untold sums of money and oceans of beer in fighting contested elections, to lose which would be the greatest possible advantage to themselves and to the country.

But all that fear, these terrors, this striving, this political warfare, this vast expenditure is in vain, for one of two things always happens,—either we entirely overthow them, as we did by the uprising of public opinion in 1832, in the time of the first Reform Bill, or, as in 1846 and in 1867, their own leaders come forward and capitulate. I must say—and if there be any member of the Tory party here I hope he will convey my feelings to his friends—I must say I feel a great commiseration for them, for it seems to me that their political life must be one unvarying cup of sorrow and disappointment. Then, as if the last drop of it were never to be taken, there is always something more left which they have to swallow afterwards. I know Mr. Mill, the eminent member for Westminster, says the Tory party are naturally the stupid party. Well, that, I believe, is not denied by any intelligent man among the Tories. Unless they are so stupid that they cannot easily feel, the retrospect must be exceedingly humiliating to them, and the future, or their endeavours to look into it, must be equally gloomy; but this last humiliation appears to me to be almost the deepest of all.

Lord Derby has been considered more than any other man to be relied on. 'Among the faithless, faithful only he.' Everybody has not been of that opinion even among the Tories, for I recollect once by an accident spending an evening at a Welsh watering-place in company with the proprietor of an out-and-out Tory journal published in this county, and he told me he did not think much of Lord Derby. He used a term which will be understood by a good many here. He did not think Lord Derby was a thorough-

bred Tory; he was only a 'broken-hair'd 'un.' My friend evidently knew rather more about Lord Derby than some of those who followed him. But if you look back upon Lord Derby's career you will see some reason why his friends should have trusted him. In 1835 he quitted the Whig party of that day because he would not consent to inquire into or to interfere with the revenues of the Irish Established Church; and then in 1846 he quitted Sir R. Peel and his Government because he would not consent to go, with the rest of Sir R. Peel's colleagues, from Protection to Free Trade. Seeing that he had been so faithful to all that is worst in the Tory creed, in 1835 as to the Irish Church, and in 1846 with regard to the Corn Law, I say there was very fair reason to believe that he was a man who might be implicitly trusted; that at any rate, whatever might come, Lord Derby would never haul down the Conservative flag. Well, that might have been fairly said up to last year, but in 1867, the year which is now about to close, the whole scene changed. In the coming pantomime that will probably be exhibited here there will be nothing more wonderful, and, if there were not something in it melancholy, hardly anything more amusing than the transformation scene that has taken place in Parliament. All the arguments that were before used have been forgotten. Every fact upon which orators and writers relied has been kicked aside. Speeches without number, votes more than I can tell, protestations of the most fervent character, principles which you thought never could be stirred from their hearts, all these have been buried for ever, and it is considered an indiscreet thing even to refer to them. Even now the insolence which Lord Derby has sometimes manifested in his speeches, the invective of Mr. Disraeli, the scurrilous vituperation of the Tory press—of which we have heard and seen more, I hope, than some of us have taken the trouble to read—all this, poured upon me and others for years, has now been proved to be entirely a

mistake. In point of fact it is discovered in the year 1867—and I think it ought to be chronicled with other great discoveries of the century, certainly of the year—that my principles all along have been entirely Constitutional and my course perfectly patriotic. It has been found this year that the man who alone was considered faithful to his party has hauled down his flag. He has forced through Parliament and permitted to be given to the country a Reform Bill, so far as the suffrage in the boroughs goes, of a very extensive character. Indeed, I say it is a democratic Bill, because I maintain that it is scarcely possible to give a more thoroughly democratic Bill, as regards the boroughs of England and Wales, than that which has been passed, and that the suffrage which has been permitted to be passed by the Government of Lord Derby is probably as democratic as if he had enacted that portion referring to the suffrage contained in the People's Charter.

Let us remember too, that although at present it is confined to the boroughs, all the arguments on which it has been supported are arguments which go to justify the extension of the same suffrage to the counties. If it be better that the institutions of the country should be established on a wider basis in the towns, why not in the counties? If the people feel such attachment to the Throne and to the institutions of the country, so as to admire the House of Lords and the Established Church within the limits of boroughs, is it reasonable to doubt that all these affectionate feelings exist even to a stronger degree outside the boroughs and in those portions of the kingdom which we call counties? In point of fact, having made the concession which they have made this year, though their votes may be withheld for a time, they cannot in the slightest degree supply arguments for withholding the suffrage from the great body of the people who are living in the counties. Only two things are required in order to give us a really democratic Parliament. The one

is that the distribution of seats should be in some degree in proportion to the population, and that every voter should be permitted by the shelter and the machinery of the ballot to vote according to his own honest intentions. When that is done—and I think the ballot is not a very long way off—I expect another very important change in the distribution of seats may occur at no great distance. When that is done, then I say we shall have a democratic and a popular House of Commons; and whether the legislation and administration of the country be wise or foolish will depend upon the wisdom or the folly of the great body of the people.

Lord Derby has done all this in a certain way,—that is, he has held the reins of office while in the confusion of parties the thing has been done, and he has done it rather than surrender office. It is not saying anything unfair to Lord Derby to say that he does not, and did not, believe in the advantages of household suffrage. It is impossible that between the Session of 1866 and the Session of 1867 he should have made this vast change in his opinions and convictions. He has done it to keep his party together, as he took office in the summer of 1866 in order that he might not break up his party. That is his own admission. And it is provable, beyond all contest, that he brought in a Reform Bill, and permitted that Bill to be carried, not because he approved of that Bill, but because he was determined that on this question, at all events, his opponents should not eject him from office. If any one of you will call to mind what took place in the Session of 1866, you will be convinced at once that the great object of the Tory party was to drive Mr. Gladstone from office and to take his place. It was not to carry a more liberal Bill than that which they had denounced because it was so liberal; for when they began to form a government, it is said, and I believe truly, that they entered into indirect negotiations with a distinguished opponent of

Reform, Mr. Lowe, and asked him to join Lord Derby's Government.

But what changed their opinions between then and the Session of 1867? Without doubt the great meetings which took place in different parts of the country, which showed them that if they met Parliament without the promise of a Bill they would within a single fortnight after its meeting have to go back to that side of the House on which they had sat upon so long, and on which they never seemed to feel the smallest degree of comfort. During that Session of 1866 it is impossible to describe, in language which would not seem to be exaggerated, unfair, and even insulting, the eager and howling rage which they exhibited against the unfortunate proposal of a 7*l.* franchise. Their bitterness and malice against the Bill would have been scarcely justified if the Bill had been as bad as they said it was, and it is clear now that it was not nearly so bad as they declared it to be. Their conduct in the pursuit of office reminds me of some lines which were published a good many years ago, which never had a more exact application than when they describe the course of the Tory party last year. The poet in the 'Rejected Addresses' says:—

> 'So when "Dogs' meat" re-echoes through the street,
> Rush sympathetic dogs from their retreat,
> Beam with bright blaze their supplicating eyes,
> Sink their hind legs, ascend their joyful cries.
> Then, wild with hope, or maddening to prevail,
> Points the quick ear and wags the expectant tail.'

Just so the gentlemen of the front Opposition benches, and such of them behind who thought that there was something to be had, were sure to act. Especially, and above all, was it the case with the lawyers, who have since been gorged with patronage, and for the sake of that patronage and plunder, which in India is called loot, formed a combination to overthrow the Bill of 1866. To place themselves in office and to keep themselves there they consented to pass a Bill in-

finitely worse on all the points for which they condemned the Bill of 1866. I venture to say their conduct on this occasion leads to the conclusion that there is scarcely any institution of the country, however honourable and ancient, that they would not sell for the permanent possession of office.

But, if there be occasion for us to criticise the conduct of the Parliamentary Tory party, we may not the less rejoice at the triumph which our opponents have achieved. There is more to be added. They were not ready to let the thing be done quietly; but since the rising of Parliament they have taken steps to add greatly to that triumph, for we have seen the leaders of the Tory party at great banquets in different parts of the country dancing with a sort of grotesque exultation at the success of the principle of which they have all along been the stoutest opponents, and which they have declared in their speeches would be the destruction of the Constitution and of the best interests of the country. To crown the whole thing, we have seen Lord Derby, the last defender of protection, the last and firmest bulwark against democracy—we have seen him exhibiting himself in defence of free trade and household suffrage on the platform of the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Notwithstanding this, I suppose that our friends the Tories will still have faith, for their credulity is without limit, and still believe in him—they must believe in somebody—and that Lord Derby will stand as a sort of saint in the political calendar of the Conservative party.

So much with regard to the past, which is full of interest, full of material for astonishment. The future, which is not so clear, is full of interest, but it is full also of anxiety, because there can be no doubt that a matter will have to be discussed in Parliament before long which will excite to a great extent the feelings of the country, and in all probability may excite the heat and the animosity of parties. The representation of the country is not completed, as we well know, by

this Bill. We who have been active promoters of Reform for the last twenty or twenty-five years never limited our demands to the mere extension of the suffrage in boroughs. It is not enough that men should have votes; I would undertake, as I have said before, to give a vote to every man in the kingdom, and yet I could so arrange matters that the Parliament would not only be not more popular or democratic, but less so than it was before. At this moment there are in England and Wales about fifty-six small towns with a population ranging from 3,000 to 8,000 each, which under the new Bill will return fifty-six members; those fifty-six members, one for each borough, will be returned by a population not much more than half the population of Manchester or Birmingham. The result would not have been so bad provided those Members actually represented the persons in whose names they profess to speak, but the real fact is, that they do not represent the constituents of those boroughs as you see them placed upon the registers of electors. Last spring I was down in Somersetshire, and I saw half-a-dozen gentlemen from a small and interesting town there. They came to talk to me about politics, and I asked them what would become of their borough, which at present returns two Members, if one of those Members were taken away. The answer was, 'So long as we have two Members we have a fair chance of returning one Liberal, and we generally do it; but when we shall have only one Member to return, Mr. So and So'—mentioning the name of a gentleman in the neighbourhood whom I do not now remember—'and the Cathedral will be too strong for us.' Therefore in that borough, hitherto divided between the two parties, Mr. So and So and the Cathedral will return the one Member, and he will sit on the Tory side of the House. He will not represent the free voice or voices of the people of the town, but those voices which are subject to the control of that gentleman who lives in the neighbourhood, and of that Cathedral influence, which is very strong in the

borough. That is but one instance of nearly all these boroughs. There are very few of these fifty-six which really have any proper qualification for representation at all; and so long as you have in the House of Commons a very large section of Members returned in this way, you will see at once that the popular voice of the country—the voice of the great constituencies like Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, and a score of others—will have nothing like its proper influence in Parliament, because two men returned from a great town in Lancashire or Yorkshire will find themselves met by two men returned from two villages somewhere in the South or the West. All this will have to be changed very greatly before the subject of Reform is really settled.

Reference has already been made to the question of the Ballot, and I shall only dwell upon it for a moment or two. The other day, in one of the speeches delivered at Ormskirk or Southport, you who have read those speeches will remember that reference was made to the Ballot, and while I was disappointed to find that anything should have been said against it, I took comfort when I found that so little could be said. What was said was mainly this, that in this country we were accustomed to the rule and principle that public duties should be performed in public, and that is only a slight elaboration of the old statement that the Ballot would be un-English. It is curious enough that nearly all the English who formed colonies, especially in the southern hemisphere, find the Ballot a most admirable machinery for elections, and it is there universally accepted as the means by which public duties may be performed in public. Take a court of justice. That is held in public. People may come in as they like, the reporters take notes of the proceedings, and the judge and jury are before the public, but the jury itself discusses and deliberates and comes to its conclusion in secret, and it is understood to be very dishonourable in any juryman, after the jury have given their verdict, to inform

any person not upon the jury, any outsider, as to what was the particular view of any member of the jury. It is felt to be essential for the right performance of that important duty that the jury should retire, and that its deliberations and conclusions should be in secret. Then take Parliament. Parliament is open to the public; people come in; the reporters are there; and every morning, if you read the papers, you may know more of what has been done in Parliament than anybody in the House itself. That is all public; but the Cabinet does not sit in public; the Ministers of the Queen hold their deliberations and come to their conclusions in secret; and it is only when a great result has to be explained to the public in Parliament that the matter becomes in any degree open to the public. So with regard to elections, they would be in public; the returning officers, the agents of the candidates, they would all be in public; everything would be fully known except the individual vote of the individual elector—that would be deposited in the ballot-box, or urn; and to the great advantage of the town and the constituency, until 4 o'clock in the afternoon nobody would know what is the result of the poll. Every man voting would thus be enabled to give his vote in accordance with his own conscientious convictions, entirely unfettered or uninfluenced by any other considerations; and the result, I will venture to say, beyond all contradiction, would give, in a more faithful manner than is possible under the present system, the actual conscientious verdict of the constituency to which the appeal should be made. I hope at the next election that this question of the Ballot will be taken up by the Liberal party everywhere, and completely discussed. I do not go into it any further now, because at some, perhaps, not distant time, I shall take an opportunity of devoting an hour at least to a thorough examination of this question, so as to show its vast advantages, not to the Liberal party alone, but to the public, and to show the utterly flimsy and untenable character of the objections

which are made to it even by the few eminent men who have discussed the matter in an adverse sense.

Before I conclude there is one other question to which reference has been made, and which I think it would not be right for me to pass by. I mean the question of the condition of Ireland. It is not my intention to say anything in the way of explanation of what I conceive to be the grievances under which the Irish people have laboured, nor of the remedies which ought long ago to have been applied. I have done this frequently, both at public meetings and within the walls of the House of Commons. One thing, at any rate, I may be allowed to say with regard to them, that I entirely disagree with those who, when any crisis or trouble arises, say that you must first of all preserve order, you must put down all disloyalty and disobedience to the law, you must assert the supremacy of the Government, and then consider the grievances that are complained of. Generally after having asserted the supremacy of the law, and having made what they call peace under the terrors of the law, the grievances are forgotten, and there is no consideration of them. This has been the case in Ireland for 200 years. The great preserver there has been the gallows. Of late years the barbarity of the law has but rarely exhibited itself; but in former years the number of persons who suffered death by the law in Ireland was something wonderful and appalling to think of. Now, twenty years ago many of you will recollect that in Ireland, under the guidance of one of Ireland's greatest sons, the late Mr. O'Connell, there were held in Ireland meetings of vast numbers of the people, equal probably in number to the meetings that were held a year ago in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, and in London. Those meetings were held to condemn certain things that were evil in Ireland, to demand remedies, to even insist that there should be a repeal of the legislative union between the two countries, for many thought that only an Irish Parliament

could abolish the miseries of Ireland; but there is not one of you that can point to any single or great measure of justice which was given to Ireland in consequence of these great meetings. They were on the other side of the Channel. They did not frighten Lord Derby like the meetings of last year; they were not so near home, and the Government in London always knew that they could count upon the power of Great Britain to prevent any great mischief being done across the Channel. The grievances were not remedied, the demands of the people were not conceded; nothing has been done in Ireland except under the influence of terror.

If you go back to the first time when the horrible penal laws were ameliorated, you will find it was during the time of the American War of Independence, when the Government in London felt that it would not do to have a great war with the colonies on hand along with disaffection in Ireland, that the penal laws were mitigated to some extent. In 1829 the Catholic Emancipation Bill was passed, but the Duke of Wellington admitted it was passed because he would not take the responsibility of civil war. Afterwards, when a great famine took place, a Poor Law was passed for Ireland, and the Encumbered Estates Court was established in order that the sale of land might be made more free; but except under the pressure of some great emergency, no man can point to anything great or good having been done by the Imperial Parliament for the Irish nation. But if these huge meetings were disregarded, what was more natural or inevitable than that a certain portion of the people, not reasoning well, stimulated by an impassioned feeling of the wrongs done to their country, should descend into the ranks, the odious and criminal ranks, of a dark conspiracy? If last year Parliament had refused to extend the franchise, if all our great meetings had been held in vain, if the popular voice had risen so that all the world should have heard it but the deaf members of the Imperial Legislature, you would have had in England, I will not say a

dark and a criminal conspiracy, but you would have had men who would gradually have worked their way among the people, and would have instructed them in principles and in practices which are near akin to the worst form of criminal conspiracy. There is nothing so safe as great meetings. Come together; look each other in the face; let the men who comprehend the things discuss them fairly before you; consider them well for yourselves; vote by an open free vote in favour of the policy that you require, and then let your rulers take that voice as significant of the will of the country, and let them bend to it and give the country that which it demands. That has never been done for Ireland, and it is on this ground, and for this reason, that you have at this moment the terrible and calamitous state of things that exists.

In America you have another Ireland—an Ireland which does not fear the Government in Ireland—an Ireland which is full of passion with regard to what it believes to be the sufferings of the country which has been left. Many of the men who hold these views are capable, and many of them desperate; they have been accustomed to deeds—what shall I say?—deeds of cruelty and of blood in the course of a most envenomed and sanguinary civil war; and, freed now from that war, what is more likely than that they should turn the instruction they have received to purposes which they believe in some degree patriotic? If the Government of England, if the Government of the United Kingdom, as it is called, had been a Government of statesmen, does any man in the world believe they would have allowed things to come to such a pass as this? If your leading and eminent men, instead of clamouring constantly for office had undertaken to teach the people what was true, great things might have been done. Ireland might have been tranquil, and the kingdom might long ago have been united. As it is, see what a position we are in. The whole civilised world points to our condition. The newspapers of

France, of Germany, and even of Italy, full of trouble as she is just now, and the newspapers of the United States, discuss with great freedom, but with more or less fairness, the condition of this country with respect to the state of things in Ireland. They do not now write about Poland, or Hungary, or Venice, but they write about Ireland, and they point to the people of Great Britain, and say that we have not done our duty towards our sister country. And whatever be the criminality which we all now deplore and condemn, a responsibility that can neither be weighed nor measured rests upon us, the people of England. Now, it would be easy to show that, as a nation and people, we have lost greatly in character by the state of things existing between England and Ireland; and if it were not a delicate subject to treat upon, one which I now think it better to avoid, it would be easy to show how greatly we have lost in national power and moral influence with other nations, and especially with regard to our powers of defence. Take one point only, the question of taxes. Many people can understand the question of taxes who cannot understand any other question. I am not able to give you the exact figures, but I suppose that at this moment we are supporting out of the Imperial taxation a force of 25,000 men in Ireland to keep the peace of a country that we have ruled over—absolutely ruled—for so many hundred years—which has been under the Sovereign and Parliament of Great Britain for so many generations. In addition to this, we have in Ireland from 12,000 to 15,000 police, equal to the very finest soldiers in the quality of the men, in drill and in discipline. This is not all; we have at this moment in Canada, 3,000 or 4,000 miles away, about 15,000 soldiers paid out of the taxes of this country—and why are they in Canada? In order that they may confront, and if necessary drive back, the Irishmen in the United States; and if it were not for the moral sense of the people of the United States and the good faith and honour of their Government, there is no doubt but that great trouble—

far greater than any we have yet seen—would have arisen on that frontier between the Irishmen in the United States and the subjects of the British Crown in Canada. Well, then, we have from 50,000 to 55,000 men whom every one of us has to help to maintain. We do not want them for any other purpose than those I have mentioned either in Ireland or in Canada, because the Irish people are a discontented and insulted people, having grievances which they constantly explain, but which we have hitherto refused to look at or refused to remedy, and there is not a single one of them which any sensible man among us will not say that we ought to have remedied them without being asked. To do so would not diminish our power of action in the least degree. Nay, it would strengthen it for every purpose, and remove from us the very greatest disgrace that has ever in our time, or in recent periods, settled on the character and reputation of England. We shall see by and by whether the present Government is capable of dealing with this question.

Sir Robert Peel, when he resigned office upon one occasion, admitted candidly that Ireland was his difficulty, not because he had not done his best to deal with it, but because of the party that sat behind him and the stolid opinion which then prevailed widely in the country; that he dared not propose to Parliament the measures which he knew were essential to the pacification of Ireland. He knew that if he proposed them he would have been driven from the leadership of his party. Therefore, he carried on the Government as long as he could doing his best, although he failed at the last, confessing that Ireland was his great difficulty. What, then, can the Tory party do with Ireland? There is no part of the United Kingdom in which the principles of the Tory party have had such full and perfect opportunities as they have had in Ireland. They have had an Established Church to their heart's content. They have usurped the ecclesiastical revenues of the whole nation, and given it to a small section, whose

whole number does not much exceed the population of all Manchester and Salford. They have had nearly all the land in the hands of great proprietors—nearly all the magistrates have been chosen from these landowners and the Protestant party. They have had any amount of soldiery and police. There is not a single thing that the most obtuse and bigoted Tory can desire which has not been employed most fully and completely in Ireland; but unfortunately for the Tories, their only specific when danger arises is terror. They have no security for allegiance, and do not comprehend any but that which consists in powerlessness to rebel; and the consequence is now that I fear they will act as in time past, enter on repressive measures of the most stringent character, will enforce a severe administration of the law, and will call on the people of England to support them in all that is severe. I could make some excuse for a severe administration of the law, if I saw that its administration would rapidly advance measures which are likely to give satisfaction to a disloyal people. At present I see nothing of the kind. Perhaps when Parliament opens we may hear something, but I venture to say that there is no man in Ireland who is a greater traitor to the Queen and the laws of this country than a Minister who continues to hold office, and is at the same time not enlightened enough, who has not moral courage enough, to recommend to the Crown and to propose to Parliament measures of justice for the pacification of Ireland. Do not let me be understood as saying that if there were a change of Government this question would be grappled with with the force which is necessary. There are men among the leaders of the Whig party who have fair sentiments with regard to Ireland, but who, whenever they treat of this question, are afraid of dealing with it as it must be dealt with, and therefore it might be necessary, if there were a change of Government—suppose that change of Government were such as people generally expect—to stimulate by vigorous language and by a strong expression of public opinion

the timid counsels of those who might succeed the present Government when it resigns office. But the more I consider this question, the more I am impressed with its indescribable seriousness. I foresee many possibilities, and I am sure that what I foresee is not without foundation, but I cannot and I dare not discuss them before this audience. I think that there are such perils as for a long time this country has not known, and that it requires great resolution and wisdom, such as we do not often find in our Governments, to meet them as they require to be met. If Ireland is to be made content, if her wounds are to be healed, if there is to be henceforth what there never has yet been—a united kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—if the sceptre of the Queen, representing the majesty of the law, shall ever be of equal authority east and west of the Channel, this must be done, and this can only be done, by measures of great statesmanship and of justice. The morals of the turf, whether adopted on the floor of Parliament or in the secrecy of the Cabinet, will fail here. The disease which we are discussing is one of a different character. There are remedies, unless it be that the remedies are too late. Has this country fallen so low that it can produce no statesman equal to these things? I say the man who, leading the counsels of the Queen's Government, shall grasp this great question and conclude it—who shall comprehend the remedies, shall administer them, and shall make them law—will do that which in future time the pen of history will delight to trace. He will to the very full gratify the noblest ambition of his mind, and he will build up for himself a lasting memorial in the happiness and the gratitude of a regenerated nation.

IV.

BIRMINGHAM, FEBRUARY 5, 1868.

[On this day a breakfast was given by Mr. J. S. Wright, the Chairman of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, to the artisans who had, at the instance of the Society of Arts, visited the Paris Exhibition. Several of the speakers expressed alarm at the risks which, in their opinion, English manufactures were running from the rivalry of foreigners, and were urgent that the Government of the country should give assistance, by public grants, to technical education.]

BEFORE I say anything upon the special object of this meeting, I must be allowed to thank you for the most kind expressions which you have used with regard to me. I am very sorry that there should be any great subject on which you and I are supposed very much to differ, but if there be such I can only say that I give you that full credit for purity of intention and for honest convictions which you give me, and I hope that in our walk through life, though we do not take exactly the same course, we may have the honest intention of doing something if we can to help forward the one great end which you have described as the promotion of the interests of our fellow-men and of our common country.

With regard to the purpose of this meeting, I feel myself rather as if I had been entrapped on this occasion, because my mind has not for a long time past been running much on the subject of education, and I find myself in the state of some of our Conservative friends who are being dragged on at

a rate which almost bewilders them. There is a very feverish anxiety abroad to do something for the education of the people. Years ago, in discussing the question of the Suffrage, I have often argued that the ignorance in which we find a very large proportion of our population was in itself a fact strongly condemnatory of the character, and I will say the really unpopular character, of the present Government. I ventured to make a prediction on more than one occasion that if by any means we could have in this country a thorough representation of the people—I speak not now of any particular franchise, be it universal or household, or something short of that, but a representation which should be a large and fair and honest representation of the people—three years would not elapse before we should have established some general system of instruction, not for the rich or for everybody, but for the great mass of the people who live upon their labour and their weekly wages. Well, we have had a Bill passed which approaches in the limits of the boroughs to that which the most democratic have aspired after in the extension of the franchise, and before that Bill has come into operation, and while people are only looking at it and wondering what it will turn out and what it will become, everybody has found out that the people are not educated, and there is a general rush into a new field of political action, and an excitement upon the subject which is greater than has existed in any previous time within our memory. It is a very happy thing to say that a good many obstructions—cobwebs, I may call them, though something more formidable and stronger—are being swept away under the influence of this new feeling. I believe that some of the assumptions of zealous members of the Established Church with regard to the question of education are being abandoned, and that some of the scrupulous objections held by zealous men among the Nonconformists are also found to be things that are not tenable, and that they are disappearing from the field.

But still, with all one's gratification, I am not at all certain that there is not something like a precipitancy and rashness in the propositions which are being submitted to the public, and perhaps I shall be obliged before I sit down to throw a little cold water on some things that are being said, and which good men zealously advocate. I do not believe in everything being done by the Government, and the speech of the gentleman who has taken such a distinguished part in the Paris Exhibition rather surprised me, especially as he comes, I believe, from the north of the Tweed, where the people are generally considered to be able to take care of themselves. I think there is very doubtful wisdom in proclaiming that everything that is to be done, or almost everything, should be done by the Government. As regards the expense, if the Government did not spend so much as it does unnecessarily and unwisely in other directions it would be very easy, with far less national expenditure than we have now, to do far more than the greatest enthusiast asks to be done with regard to this particular question. But at present, as far as I can see into the matter, I should not ask the Government, either by grants or by rates, by one or the other, or by the two combined, to do anything for public education except for that class of the people whose condition is one of, I will say, to a great exteut, deplorable ignorance, and is the result of very great neglect on the part of the Government in past times. Now, the mass of the labouring population, whether in town or country, as we all know —perfectly well know, notwithstanding the number of figures to the contrary,—the mass of the labouring population is not in a satisfactory condition with regard to its education. I believe it is infinitely below that of Prussia, and I think also of Switzerland, and infinitely below that of the corresponding class, if there be a corresponding class, in the Northern States of the American Union. For all above there are ample means—I mean the middle class and

the class above them, who have certainly the means of educating their children if they choose to do it. I do not see exactly where the remedy is. There may be much done with regard to the better application of the endowments that exist. There is no doubt a prodigious annual income throughout the country which proceeds from the piety, or some other quality, of our ancestors: on this, special sections of the people have laid hold, and from this the great body of the people to a great extent has been excluded; and much might be made of that. But I do not believe in the necessity or the wisdom of the Government making any special provision for that class of the people whose means are sufficient for the education of their own children, and therefore I confine myself in my view of what ought to be done to that very large portion of the people who have no property but their weekly incomes, and who at present have not the means—and have not the disposition either to contribute of what means they have—sufficient to procure the education for themselves. I dare say, with regard to the middle classes, when we get rid a little more of sectarian differences, that it would be possible for them in no very considerable time to establish institutions which are more of a collegiate character than those which now exist, and education might be forwarded among them by their own voluntary combinations. There is, therefore, no necessity to apply to Government for them.

With regard to the question of technical education, I understand that technical education means the teaching of trades, or the fundamental principles upon which successful manufactures are based. Now, suppose we had in this country all the working people educated,—I mean thus far, that every boy and girl among them, as near as could be, should understand how to read, should comprehend what was read, should go through the ordinary rules of arithmetic, and had that little general knowledge which every child picks up at school—such as a little knowledge of history, a little know-

ledge of geography, and probably a little knowledge of drawing,—supposing that this knowledge was universal among all the children of the labouring classes, what else would be necessary? You would find from out of that vast body that there would be certain boys who could by no means be kept down to the level at which they left school. There would be found in their mind and brain an energy compelling them to do something more, and the desire to do it, so that if you set them upon Salisbury Plain without anybody within five miles of them, still they would carry on in some way or other their education, and would become technically educated, because one would be led into one branch and another into another, and these children, specially gifted as you find some children in all ranks of life, would become your leaders in all your various arts and manufactures. In my opinion, then, it will not be necessary to have much of what is called technical training for particular trades. I have never heard in the United States—I speak, of course, under correction—that there has been much, or anything, done in the formation of what we call technical education; and yet I will undertake to say that, looking to the short period during which the United States have been a considerable nation, there is no nation in the world that has surpassed the United States in the progress that has been made by them in manufacturing intelligence. Mr. Dixon spoke of the inventive faculty of the Americans. I believe the people of the United States have offered to the world more valuable inventions during the last forty years than all Europe put together. Now this has not arisen from the technical education of the people, but it has arisen from this—that in the United States there is no class of the people that is not sufficiently educated to be able to read and to comprehend and to think; and that, I maintain, is the foundation of all subsequent progress. Look at our condition in this country. The great rich class have no stimulus whatsoever to make any exertions. What could

stimulate a man who is a lord with a great estate, or a country gentleman with a great estate, or a rich man of almost any kind,—what could stimulate that man as a rule to do anything more? He is comfortably placed in life; he is looked on with so much respect that there is scarcely any kind of stimulus which could induce him to make any great effort. If you go to the other end of the scale in this country, you will find I know not how many millions of people totally unable to make those efforts, because they have no education whatever, and their whole life is a mere scramble to get a living. They have no opportunity, as they have no aspiration, for any great discovery or invention. But in the United States you have not that great and idle class, on the one hand, and that great poor and depressed class, on the other. The whole population is more like what we should be in this country if we lopped off the rich from one end of the scale and the poor from the other, and instead of having 5,000,000 or 6,000,000 of persons out of whom you can get no invention and progress, you had the whole 35,000,000 of people equal to the effort; then from that vast reservoir of human power, of human intellect, and of human energy you would get those great efforts which we are totally unable to make, from the circumstance that our very rich have no stimulus to make exertions, and our very poor and very ignorant have no power to do so.

I maintain, that if we were to establish throughout the country a system of primary education, simple but sound, and give to the people the power to read and to think, we should lay a broad and great foundation from which would arise almost all else that we want. With regard to the distinct and special education, about which some gentlemen have been eloquent, and about which we have heard so much during the last two or three months, my lamented friend Mr. Cobden, referring on one occasion, to the condition of Prussia, said that the Prussians were the Yankees of

Europe, and, from their education, he believed they would be the most powerful nation in Europe, because they had followed in a very large extent, and although not exactly in the same way, the system of the United States of endeavouring to give a sound education to their whole people. There is no doubt that in future the strength of nations will depend very much upon this possession—I do not mean their strength when in war, although it adds very much to that—but in the progress of invention and manufacture, in the creation of wealth, in the consciousness of self-respect, and in everything that really tends to make one nation greater than another.

Mr. Aitken has spoken of the Kensington Museum. I do not know very much about it, but certainly Mr. Cole is a very pleasant person, whom I have known for many years. I find him very actively engaged in the duties of his office. At the same time I find him assailed by a great number of persons. But it is hardly possible for any person to be actively engaged in anything without coming in contact unpleasantly with somebody or other. Nothing could be more reasonable and proper than that we should have a good museum in Birmingham, another in Manchester, and one in Sheffield, and so on, to allow opportunities for the young, and for the old too, if they choose to see what is excellent in manufacture and art, and for the purpose of study and observation. But really there is no occasion to go to the Government for that. There are some very rich men in Birmingham, although it is said they are not so rich as some of the people of Manchester; but the people of Manchester, you must bear in mind, are not nearly so rich as they were some time ago. The sum of 25,000*l.* would go a long way towards establishing a museum for a place like Birmingham. It is not a very large sum to raise. There are persons in Birmingham who might give 5000*l.*, and who would not find themselves poorer next day or less able to command the

luxuries of life. In the United States they do it far more than here, and I suppose this arises from the fact, that in this country we have a very powerful class a long way up above most of us, and there is a general striving to get up there, to make eldest sons and families, and to get into the titled or aristocratic order. Men who have any of those ambitions like to keep their money together, and they frequently forget something far higher and nobler. Many people in America—there have been some in this country—but there are many in the United States who set apart large donations for great public purposes. I could mention some of those gentlemen if necessary, though they are not personally known to me. I have often wondered how it is that among our very rich men there are not more who will set apart a portion of their wealth for objects such as those of which we have been speaking. There are many men in Birmingham—still more in Lancashire and Yorkshire and London—who in giving 10,000*l.* or 20,000*l.*, or even 50,000*l.*, would be in no degree injuring themselves, but would be accomplishing an object of the very highest order in devoting their riches to the elevation and advantage of those who have been less favourably circumstanced. I do not therefore very much favour the notion of going to Government and asking them to help us to a museum in a place like Birmingham. Having worked as you have worked for the last hundred years in building up this great town and its industry, it is monstrous to say—and if a stranger suggested it you would regard it as an insult—that there is not public spirit enough, so far as wealth is concerned, to procure for Birmingham, quite independently of the South Kensington Museum and of Mr. Cole, anything necessary to teach manufactures and art, and to give an opportunity for that kind of technical instruction to the young men who are connected with the special manufactures of the district.

On the general subject of education I shall not dwell, on

account of the feverish agitation which exists just now, for this question is not to be disposed of by any spasmodic effort. It is a subject of great magnitude and of great difficulty in this country, when you consider, I will not call them our theological, but our Church differences, and the varied views men hold. I should recommend rather what I may call a steady progress than a great rush, because in making a great rush and introducing measures based upon what I look at with great doubt—a compulsory and forced attendance at schools—I am not sure that you will not produce among the people a reactionary feeling, which may defeat the very object which you have at heart. Suppose you establish a great and broad system, and proceed to lay considerable and heavy rates upon a people who at present do not much appreciate education, and establish in your towns a kind of truant police to look after the children who do not go to school. If you bring too much weight to bear on the people before they are sufficiently enlightened to approve your efforts you may find that there is a great reaction, and your difficulties may become almost, if not altogether, insuperable. The great mass of your children now are uneducated. If you propose at once to create a great revolution of that kind I am fearful that you will find that those for whose benefit you are acting will not give you that co-operation without which it is impossible that you should succeed. I should recommend a more gradual assault on the ignorance of the country, and that we should survey the institutions already existing, and as much as possible arrange that which is new so as to dovetail with that which is old, and gradually, it may be in a few years, come to that which exists in the New England States of the American Union, where, throughout the whole country, there is scarcely a boy or a girl who does not receive a sound education. I am not speaking of mathematics and classics; those are the luxuries of culture. I am speaking of the necessities of education—that persons

should learn to read and to write, to think and to do sums in the ordinary rules of arithmetic, and have that general common school knowledge which the faculties of almost all children enable them to receive, but without any attempt to give them those luxuries which may be reserved for others.

I am afraid some of my friends will think that after all I am not a great friend of education; but that would be a great mistake. In all those public discussions in which I have been engaged during the last twenty-five years I have always argued that the ignorance of the people is the most deplorable feature in our national character. I have argued that if food could be cheaper, and trade more free, and industry more regular, and wages higher, the result would be to raise the mental condition of our population. I believe it has been raised, and is being raised, and one of the signs that it has been raised is that it asks to be raised still higher. We who have had some little education ourselves,—though I am sorry to say I have nearly forgotten all I ever had,—we, in endeavouring to extend the means of education for the people, should go on with what I would rather call a steady wisdom than with such a precipitate and feverish action as may raise great difficulties in our path. However, it is a most satisfactory thing that some of the church and sectarian differences are gone, and that there is a recognition among the people that more attention must be paid to the subject. I hope it will be as much as possible local, and not unduly sustained by either Government control or Government grants. I am sure that the good which the people will receive will be greatly enhanced in value by the self-respect created and the energy developed among the people if they are allowed to a large extent to do the work themselves.

I have said nothing of the deputation to Paris. The book in which the reports have been published only reached me as I was leaving home, and I have not had an opportunity of

reading it, but from what I have seen and heard here I must agree that such a visit must have been most useful to those who were the envoys, as they have been called, from the industry of England to the industry of the Continent. I have nothing more to say, except to ask those who think that I am slow and conservative to make such allowances for me as they can. I am sure, whatever is offered to the public and to Parliament that appears to me to be likely in any degree to add to the intellectual and moral elevation of our population, that I shall never be found unwilling to give such a purpose my cordial and hearty support.

V.

LIVERPOOL, JUNE 3, 1868.

[The Welsh National Reform Association invited Mr. Bright to be present at their Annual Meeting, to be held during Whitsuntide, at Liverpool. The Chairman of the Meeting was Mr. W. Williams, a member of the Liverpool Town Council, and the object of the gathering was to assist the progress of Reform in the Principality, and in particular, the more equitable distribution of Parliamentary representation.]

In our school-days and from our school-books we learned that Liverpool was a great seaport in the county of Lancaster; but our Chairman, notwithstanding, was not far wrong when he described Liverpool as the capital city of the Principality of Wales, for I understand there are not less than 60,000 natives of the Principality who are living in this town. I am not sure that there is to be found a larger number than this in any of the towns contained within the geographical boundary of Wales. But further, I am told that this meeting has in some degree a representative character, that there are men here from very many of the towns of Wales, and particularly of North Wales. But those from whom I got this invitation told me, what Mr. Richard has already stated, that there is among the Welsh people very great inertness or inactivity in regard to political questions; that they are firmly convinced on all questions connected with their churches and their religion, that in that one fact they are

capable of great organisation and great sacrifices, and have achieved a great success, but in regard to political questions they have seemed to think that in their comparatively small country they had very little to do with the public affairs of a great empire.

Now, I believe that it is essential for the greatest success of a country that in every part of it all men should take a real interest in national affairs, and that when great questions come up for discussion and settlement, not only should the voice of the people be heard in great cities but in small towns, nay in every village, in order that a true result and a wise decision may be arrived at. At this moment we have before us a very great question indeed, one the like of which has not come before the political people of England for their judgment and their verdict for many years past; and I hope one of the results of the holding of this meeting to-night will be that the verdict of the nation will not be given without the voice of Wales being heard in it. The great question is that of the destination, of the continuance or the removal, of the Protestant State Church in Ireland. Now, one would suppose that every Welshman would have been alive to a question of this nature. Geographically you are nearest to Ireland—at least of any portion of the southern part of this island; but, more than that, you have had an experience in religion and Church matters more remarkable and more thorough than any other portion of the people of Great Britain has had; and, apart altogether from the question of Establishments, there can be no doubt that you have a strong sympathy for justice, and as strong a wish that justice should be done to Ireland as any other portion of the population of Great Britain can have.

I need hardly tell you—for you have heard nothing and read nothing on this subject without knowing it—that Ireland has been governed by the Crown and the governing classes in England for many centuries, and that, notwithstanding

this, notwithstanding an Act of Union passed sixty-seven years ago, and notwithstanding the general impression throughout the world that Great Britain and Ireland form one kingdom, notwithstanding all this, there has never been any real union between Great Britain and Ireland, and, indeed, until lately, there has been no approach to good government in Ireland. The rule of England in the country for three centuries—I will go no further back—until a very recent period was a rule through the Viceroy or Lord Lieutenant, through the judges, and through the landowners. It was a rule of Protestant and Political ascendancy with which the Irish people had no sympathy, and against which the Irish nation has perpetually protested. If they have had three hundred years of government like this, they have had what was the inevitable result, three hundred years of misery, of discontent, of conspiracy, and of insurrection.

It was only about one hundred years ago, not quite one hundred years ago, when the war was being waged between this country and the American revolted colonies. It was only then that the English Government consented to some relaxation of its cruel rule in Ireland; and it was not until the year 1829, which seems but the other day to some of us, that any single Roman Catholic, out of 6,000,000 Roman Catholics then in Great Britain and Ireland, was permitted to take his seat in the British House of Commons. Since 1829 there has been a much more merciful and a much more just administration. But, notwithstanding this—and this was mainly the result of improved representation in England under the Reform Bill and of the advent of the Whig party to power—the supremacy has been continued, and the sign and the symbol of it has been the Protestant Establishment in Ireland. Now, let me say here that the question really before the country is not the question of State Establishments—this is not the question which I am going to discuss; it is not that to which I wish you to give your attention; it is a different question.

That may be ahead before us, but it has not yet come up for discussion or settlement.

I am not prepared to say that there never was a time in which it was not a noble idea to divide a barbarous country into parishes, to establish in every parish, as far as times and circumstances would permit, a learned and a religious man with a view to train his neighbours in civilisation, in morality, and in religion. I can conceive that it was a grand, a noble idea many years ago that this should have been done; but in those times—or in that time—there was only one religion in the country—I speak of England—and there was only one Church. Under those circumstances, the plan might be good; certainly, the plan was possible; but now circumstances are wholly changed. The same thing may be no longer necessary. The Christian Church in the United Kingdom is composed of many Churches, and clearly the establishment of any one of them must be in some degree an offence to the others; and in the judgment of many among the best and wisest men in England it can only be injurious to the favoured Church itself. As religion becomes more intelligent and more zealous, there must evidently be the less room for any interference on the part of the State.

But the question which is referred to in the resolution, and to which I shall address myself, is one purely and wholly political. Now, in the House of Commons, you know, and we have been discussing the question for the last two months, a majority—a remarkable majority—a majority amounting to not fewer on one occasion than sixty-five votes—an absolute majority of all the members of the House, supported Resolutions which declared the necessity of the entire Disestablishment of the Protestant Church in Ireland. But the Resolutions had nothing, and that vote had nothing, to do with the question of State Establishments. It had nothing to do with that which moves you in Wales to disbelieve in the good of State Churches; its main principle and its purpose was entirely

political, and with a view to a great material advantage. Now, whether a man accepts the principle of State Churches as a wise one, or whether he rejects it on grounds in which you would concur with me, you must reject the Irish Establishment. Still more so on the principle of equal justice in the nation, on the principle of what is best and what is beneficial for the empire, we must in either case equally and emphatically condemn the Irish State Church. Suppose it were proposed for the first time to found a State Church in Ireland, is there one single human being out of Bedlam—I doubt if there is one in Bedlam—who would even suggest that the State Church to be founded in Ireland should be of the Protestant Episcopal creed? Suppose you thought for the first time to establish a State Church in Scotland, would any man say that the Church to be so established should be the Protestant Episcopal Church, which is in a very small minority in Scotland? Surely no statesman—I will not say statesman, for that gives a weak impression, but I say—no man if he had to do what was judicious, and had a heart to feel what was just, would propose to establish an Episcopal Church in Scotland, or a Protestant Episcopal Church in Ireland. Such a suggestion ought to be scouted by all reasonable men.

In Ireland, notwithstanding the vast emigration which has taken place from its shores, there is a population now of little under 6,000,000 of persons. Of those 6,000,000, 4,500,000 belong to the Roman Catholic Church. Half a million, or little more—I doubt whether more than a very little more—belong to the Protestant Episcopal Church, and about half a million belong to the Presbyterian Church. The census gives us under 700,000 of Church Protestants, but we know that when a Catholic is asked what is his Church by census enumerators, he knows at once that the Presbyterian will state that he is a Presbyterian, and that a Catholic calls himself so, but that the other small sects who do not really belong to either make this kind of answer, 'That when-

ever we go anywhere, we go to church,' and therefore they swell the number of Churchmen to a point higher than it would reach if the census were taken in the same strict manner with regard to them both—with regard to Catholics on the one hand and Presbyterians on the other. I am not saying this for the purpose of exciting any ridicule against the Church, but in order to show that I believe I have fully estimated the actual numbers of those persons in Ireland who have through religious motives any regard for the Established Church there, when I put the number down at half a million of the population. Now, if we knew, being these four and a-half millions, that this little Church of half a million was planted among us by those who had conquered our fathers, if we knew also that this little Church was associated with everything that had been hostile to our national interests and our national prosperity, and if we knew further that it absorbed incomes amounting to not less than 700,000*l.* or 800,000*l.* sterling per year, these incomes being derived from national property amounting to probably 13,000,000*l.* or 14,000,000*l.* sterling,—I say, that if we were of those four and a-half millions, let me ask every man of you whether we should not feel that we have a just cause of complaint, and that there is a national grievance in our country that requires to be speedily redressed.

And here let me remind you of another thing, that the position of the Catholics in Ireland is not like our own condition either in England or Wales. In England time was, and not very long ago, when all the people were Church people. There was no nonconformity, the Church was not imposed upon us by conquest, we were not driven from it, and all the revenues, the clear revenues of the country, handed over to our conquerors. For the most part we have withdrawn from the Established Church; our forefathers have quitted it because they wished that in this manner they might have a better opportunity of enjoying religious freedom and seeking

what they believed to be Christian religious truth. The Church here is not to us a symbol of conquest, and although we may think that the institution is not very useful in this country, and least of all useful to those who are most attached to it—although we may think this, yet we feel that we can wait for whatsoever changes in regard to the Church time may bring forth—changes which will be indicated by the growth of intelligence and wisdom in the nation of which we form part. I have said that this Irish Church is a great imperial question. There are those who want to dwarf it into a sort of squabble between partizans on one side and on the other. I hold it to be an imperial question in this manner. It is a question of the empire of union or of civil strife, it is a question of strength or weakness to the nation; and I can boldly assert this, that I believe a majority of the people of England, of the people of Wales, of the people of Scotland, and we know a great majority of the people of Ireland, nay I believe every thoughtful and intelligent man in the civilised world outside of these islands, emphatically condemns this Church of Ireland.

Well, but who are opposed to us, and wish to make it permanent? I suppose I must describe them by a term which is familiar to us. It is the Tory party in Parliament and the country. But when any man, looking at the question for the first time, and seeing who it is that opposes a State Church in Ireland and who it is that supports it, imagines that it is his duty to go with the Tory party, I would ask him to recollect this fact—that this party has been opposed, so far as we know at every time, to almost every measure of wisdom and of justice that has been proposed in regard to either England or Ireland. In 1833, just after the passing of the Reform Bill, there was a Bill introduced into Parliament, not for the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland, but for its diminution. You will not believe it even if I tell you, I shall have to refer you to the Annual Register or to Hansard's

Debates, or to some of those publications in which all men are supposed to believe, but in that little Church population of Ireland, which I tell you is not more now than 500,000 or 600,000 persons—100,000 families—a population scarcely larger than the population of this great city in which we are assembled,—that for that population in Ireland, in that particular Church set up there by the conquering power, there were not less than twenty-two bishops receiving an income of more than 130,000*l.* a year. There were all kinds of dignities, the names of which I am not even familiarly acquainted with, from bishops down to curates, and there were, I believe, from 1,500 to 2,000 clergymen, reckoning holders of benefices and their curates. And the whole of those established there for what purpose? To teach a form of Protestantism to a population not larger than the population of Liverpool. The world elsewhere has no example, I will undertake to say, of an enormity like that, and yet, when the Government of that day brought in a Bill to reduce the numbers from twenty-two bishops to twelve, there was a great outcry made against the measure, and it was opposed—violently opposed—in both Houses of Parliament, on one ground or another, though the Bill ultimately passed. Some of those who supported it—and I believe there were even some English bishops who supported the Bill—for the most part supported it on the sagacious principle that they might go further and fare worse.

Now, we have lately had a spectacle which is very exhilarating to my mind in one way, though I wish the cause had been rather better—we have seen the archbishops and bishops of the Church of England doing what is described in America when they say a man has taken to the 'stump.' St. James's Hall, a building in which many remarkable meetings have been held, has been filled with ardent friends of the Established Church everywhere,—not apparently of this Established Church, but of the Established Church everywhere. It has been filled with an audience of devoted admirers of Established Churches,

and the platform was crowded with archbishops and bishops and dignitaries of the most august and imposing character. So ardent were they in their cause, that when a very admirable gentleman, who occupies no less an office than that of Dean of Westminster, began in a speech he made to approach the question in a moderate and rational manner, he was positively hissed down. I am only sorry he did what it appeared to me he did, mistake his duty in finding his way to this meeting. But what was this meeting about? I have heard it described in various language. One gentleman said it was a meeting of trades' unions; some one else, not less ingenious or less accurate, said it appeared to him a meeting of shareholders in a very lucrative concern, who fancied by some possibility their dividends might be reduced. Now, I have no objection to these important and dignified persons coming before the public on platforms and discussing public questions; I wish they would do it oftener, and I wish it had been their practice in past times. But I never heard that they met in such numbers to discuss any great question of public interest before. For the last two hundred years, up to the end of the great war with France, this country was almost constantly engaged in war. I never knew them meet to promote peace and to condemn war. When the great question of slavery agitated the country, though there were some of them that gave their support to the right side on that question, there was no combined and unanimous movement in regard to it. When twenty-five or thirty years ago we met—some of you who are here to-night, probably, in this very building—to denounce one of the greatest iniquities that ever assumed the form of law—the Corn Law—the archbishops and bishops never for one moment deemed it their duty to express an opinion upon the question, or, so far as we know, to give it five minutes' examination. I have never known them in England or Ireland, in the most calamitous days of our modern history—I have never known them come

forward in any combined manner to expose the sufferings and denounce the wrongs which were practised upon their poorer countrymen; but now, when they think—and in my opinion they are mistaken in the presentiment—that their Church in England is menaced by proceedings which are being taken with regard to the Church in Ireland, they are all up in arms, and one would suppose that the whole country and Christianity were going at once to ruin. Suppose that a foreign Power were to come to England and take from them all the ecclesiastical revenues of the English Church and hand them over to the bishops and clergy of a small and unimportant minority, and make that the garrison for holding this country in subjection to that foreign Power, what would those archbishops and bishops say in a case like that? And yet that is precisely the position in which the Established Church of Ireland stands before all the world, and in the support of which those eminent and dignified persons come violently forward.

Now, what is it that we propose to do? So far as I am concerned, I should be sorry to join any political party that was about to do a real injury or a real injustice to any portion of the people. We propose—Mr. Gladstone in his Resolution proposed—the House of Commons, by its great majority, has resolved—to place the Episcopal Church—the Protestant Episcopal Church in Ireland, in this position—a position familiar to you. You have been in this position for a long time, you know exactly its hardships, its grievances, its advantages, and its glorious successes. We propose to put the Protestant Episcopalians of Ireland in exactly the same position that the Welsh Free Churches are in now,—in that position in which the Wesleyan Churches and in which the Free Churches of Scotland are; and also, I may say, it is the same position in which all the Protestant Churches, the Episcopalian included, are in Canada, in the Australian colonies, and in the United States of North

America. But we propose to give them this advantage, which you have never had, to leave them in possession of all the churches wherever they have a congregation that will keep them in repair, and of all the parsonage houses belonging to those churches where there are congregations who will support a minister. You have had to build on your hill-sides and in your valleys in Wales all those churches and chapels of yours which we see in travelling through your lovely country. In Scotland the churches and manses of the Free Church have been built within the last twenty-five years by members of the Free Church. In England I need not tell you that half the people of every creed who go to places of worship go to buildings which have been erected by the voluntary offerings of those who are not connected with the Episcopal Church. If you go to Ireland you would find 5,000,000 Roman Catholics who own scarcely any of the land, but who have been in times past the poor, the naked, and the meanest in the land, who have established for themselves chapels and priests' houses and hospitals and schools, nearly, if not altogether, sufficient for the spiritual wants of their people. Well, then, we propose to deal thus with this Established Church of Ireland. The Archbishops and Bishops who met in St. James's Hall cried out as if we were about to perpetrate the grossest and most intolerable cruelty to which men have ever been subjected. There are one or two facts connected with that Church which are worth knowing. From Parliamentary reports and returns,—documents which I believe may be relied upon,—it appears that for thirty years—from 1833 to 1862—there has been a sum of not less than 3,500,000*l.* paid by the Ecclesiastical Commission for the churches and glebe houses of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Well now, during that time, or a rather longer time,—taken from the beginning of this century, a period of sixty-seven years,—the Roman Catholic Church has expended in voluntary contributions a sum of not less than 5,000,000*l.* sterling. But

there is a further very curious statement—that for sixty years previous to 1833 the whole sum contributed by the Protestant Episcopal sect in private donations has been not more than 170,000*l.*, or about 3000*l.* a year; and it is believed now, and I believe it can be proved, that of late years the Catholics of Ireland, of their own private voluntary donations, have contributed not less than 200,000*l.* a-year for their voluntary religious purposes. So, unless these poor cripples of the Episcopal Church of Ireland are invalided by State support—unless they are feebler, less zealous, and less earnest than almost all the rest of the people of the United Kingdom and the colonies of this empire, surely they can do as much as others can do, and more and better than anything that they have hitherto done.

Now, if this Bill should pass—I mean the Bill that in the course of things, if the Parliament to be elected in winter should take the same view as the Parliament now sitting, will pass, what will happen with the Irish Church? These archbishops and bishops believe that chaos will come again. Nothing of the sort. What will happen will be this:—The Irish Episcopal Church would summon what in America they call a convention. In other words, the archbishops, the bishops, and clergy, and their congregations if they can bring them together, would send to Dublin 1,000 or 500 or any smaller number of thoughful earnest men to determine on their future organisation of the Church. When they come together they can settle all questions of creed and all questions of discipline, and they will require, of course, to originate what they call in the Free Church of Scotland a Sustentation Fund—that is, a fund to which everybody gives who is able and willing to give—a fund out of which ministers are supported in remoter parishes and districts where their congregations are too poor to support them. Of course the rich congregations in Ireland would be just as able and, I hope, just as willing to help the poorer

congregations as the people of Wales or the people of Scotland. And when that is done there will be a free Protestant Episcopal Church in Ireland. Judging from what the Protestant Churches have done elsewhere we need not be afraid of the result. I said years ago that the abolition of the Established Church in Ireland would afford in that country one more chance to the Protestant religion; it would go forth with its free Bible and its truths, and, no longer weighted by the intolerable burden of its connexion with the State, it could offer its teaching in gentleness and Christian love to the whole population of that island. But there would not only be a change in the condition of the Episcopal Church; the whole condition of Ireland would be changed, for ancient grievances would be redressed. Then strife would cease, and justice would have become in Ireland a guiding principle of the Imperial Parliament. I believe that we should soon begin to have, and should ultimately have, a united nation and a loyal people.

Now, Mr. Richard asked the question, Can Wales do anything to help on this great movement? You are Nonconformists in Church matters, you are Liberals in politics. I know Members from Wales in the House of Commons, some who are Liberals, and some who are not Liberals; but I believe they are all liberal enough to acknowledge this, that you are generally Nonconformists in Church matters, and that you are generally Liberals in politics. I recollect one of those who are not on our side of the House telling me that he thought generally 'the people of Wales were followers of my friend Mr. Cobden and myself.' He meant of course, as far as they studied political questions, that they inclined to views which my lamented friend and I have held during the last twenty or twenty-five years. You are a people capable of great self-restraint, although you are said to be rather hot-tempered. You are very industrious, very frugal, and very orderly as citizens. The Judges when they go through Wales

have almost nothing to do. I was lately at Dolgelly, when her Majesty's representative the Judge of Assize came round, in great style of course, with the sheriff and his friends and followers; there was the Judge with all his retinue and cook—I do not know whether it is true, but a Welshman told me that the Judges always bring their cooks with them—but I think that there were only two prisoners, and they were both tramps who had come from England. If you have all these great qualities, if you are capable in other matters of the remarkable organisation which you exhibit in religious matters, surely you may do something in another field where it is hardly less your duty to work than in that religious field in which you are so eminent. Our great poet, in that exquisite poem which his inspired genius has left us, has described the Welsh as 'an old and haughty nation, proud in arms.' The arms that you wield now are not such as your forefathers wielded, but they are infinitely more effective and infinitely more irresistible. You could not, in the times that are passed, contend with the power of England; but now you may unite your power with the power of all men who love freedom either in England or in Ireland, and you may, by a significant addition to our Parliamentary majority, contribute to the success of that great question which is now before Parliament and the country. I know that the influence of your landowners is great. I was one day conversing with a Welsh farmer; he occupied nearly 200 acres of land, and was a man of excellent character. When he spoke of his landlord he always spoke of him as 'my master.' I believe that he was not less independent than other Welsh farmers, but the phrase struck me as rather peculiar and somewhat unpleasant. I know not whether until you have the Ballot you will be able to make head against the power that is over you, but still, when I think of what you have done in religious matters with your wonderful organisation, of the way in which you have triumphed over

the oppressions of a hundred and fifty years ago, I think it is not impossible that you should succeed even against this power. Public opinion is less tolerant now, at any rate less tolerant than it was formerly, of the coercion practised by landed proprietors. It will become probably every year less and less tolerant. I can conceive the time when no landowner in Wales will dare to expel a tenant for exercising conscientiously his right to vote. The day will come when there will be a morality in these questions so omnipotent that a landowner will be thought as evil a man if he robs his tenant of his vote as if he had robbed him of any article of property which he possesses.

Well, I have confined myself to this first question—I quote from a speech of a Member of the Government—'It is the question of the hour.' A general election is near at hand. It must come between now and March; it may come, and probably will come, between this time and Christmas. There are many efforts made to deceive the electors; the present First Minister is skilled in phrases, especially in phrases that are calculated to deceive. More than twenty years ago he condemned the Church of Ireland in language as forcible as any that I could use, for he denounced it as an alien Church. During the present Session, being himself in very difficult circumstances, he has offered to the Roman Catholic bishops of Ireland to endow for them, for the Roman Catholic Church, a Roman Catholic University. Do not imagine that I am condemning this proposition because it is made to the Catholic Church. What I would do for a Protestant Church I would do for the Catholic Church. I say that this Minister condemned the alien Church many years ago. He understands the question as well as any one of us. This Session he has proposed to establish by charter and to endow a Roman Catholic University in Ireland. He has felt his way as to whether Parliament and the country would tolerate his endowment of the Church of Rome in Ireland; he has

spoken contemptuously of the pittance of 40,000*l.* a-year which is voted by Parliament for the Presbyterian ministers in Ireland, and he and his colleagues have spoken of levelling up, saying his policy was not to destroy, but to create. How will you level up Ireland, if the Established Church is to remain as it is, but by placing the Catholic Church upon an equal platform in regard to the favour it is to receive from the State? What was the purpose of suggesting the miserable amount of the Regium Donum but to hold out to the Presbyterians of Ireland the hope that, if they would be quiet while another transaction was being done, they should have their 40,000*l.* annual vote doubled or greatly increased? In point of fact this very Minister, who twenty years ago denounced the Established Church of Ireland as an alien Church, comes forward now, in his position of First Minister, and offers to the Catholic Church with the one hand a great bribe, and to Presbyterians with the other another great bribe, on the sole condition that they shall allow him to continue for ever the Protestant Church in Ireland; and then, after making these offers to the Church of Rome, and finding that Parliament is not in favour of them, he does his best to set up the cry of 'No Popery' to serve at the next election. Why that 'No Popery' cry has done much harm in time past, but it never did so much harm within the last hundred years to the Catholics as it has done to the Protestants. It has prevented the Protestants of the United Kingdom from being just to their Catholic countrymen, and I know no greater harm that could be done to a people than by doing that which shall make them disregard the first principles of justice.

Now I speak to you, Welshmen, who, inhabitants of this town, are representatives of your brethren in the Principality, you who have done so much for religious freedom, you who made Christianity universal throughout your country; I ask you to resolve upon this,—that nothing shall draw you from your determination to grant as far as lies in your power

perfect religious equality in Ireland; not equality with a Roman Catholic State Church, but equality with a Protestant Free Church in that nation—pure equality, in fact, on the voluntary principle. It is admitted by everybody that you must aim at equality in Ireland. That is only political justice. But it can be effected only in one of two ways, either by endowing and making a State Establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, or by disestablishing the Protestant Church and adopting the voluntary principle throughout the whole of the country. It is for you to decide what you will do. I observe among your Welsh members, and it is a very curious fact, that more of them voted against Church-rates than on behalf of anything else that is liberal. The reason is this, that among Welsh populations Church-rates were a known and felt grievance until they were abolished, and therefore your Members took care generally to be in the House when the Church-rate question was discussed, and a larger number of them voted for the abolition of Church-rates than against any other nuisance or evil that I am acquainted with. So, if you will go as near to your representatives on this question of the Irish Church—feel that to be your own grievance—you may depend upon it we shall have a better vote in Parliament in the next Session from the Welsh Members than perhaps we have ever had before. I hold you, I bind you to this, that you are for justice to Catholic and Protestant in Ireland, established on the voluntary principle; and I argue that you must have this opinion, and that you will support it, because you cannot sever Christianity from justice, and because you know and feel that to do justice to Ireland and to Irishmen must be to add honour and unity and strength to the Crown and to the people of this Empire.

(A vote of thanks having been passed to Mr. Bright, Mr. Bright acknowledged it, and added):—

I feel that if I were not so hoarse I should take the opportunity, in returning my thanks to you for your kindness, to

make one or two further observations. The gentlemen who have moved and seconded this resolution have referred to the fact that I have come to this meeting during the four or five days of the Parliamentary recess. When I was first asked to come down, as Mr. Rathbone knows, after having argued the question with him, I wrote to him to excuse myself and to decline. However, Welshmen appear to be more pertinacious than Mr. Rathbone, or perhaps he suggested the next assault that was made upon my intentions, and a deputation came to the House of Commons to ask me to come here. Now, the question is one of that extraordinary importance that I did not feel myself at liberty to refuse to come when it was represented to me that possibly the influence of this meeting might extend beyond the bounds of Liverpool, and might reach some portions of the Principality of Wales. One way in which I hold this meeting to be of special importance is that I have heard what has been said by the speakers to-night as to the great contest in which we are engaged, and the desperate struggle which will be made at the next general election. I have heard elsewhere of the funds which are being provided by the friends of the Government and the friends of the Irish Church. All this may be quite true. I have asked myself what will happen in case we should be defeated. It seems an extravagant question to put, but, not to omit a regard for all sides of the question, let us ask ourselves what would happen if we should be defeated. You know that in Ireland there are elements of great disorder. There is a Fenian party of considerable dimensions and of great activity. Beyond them there is a very large amount of what I may call tacit disloyalty; beyond that there is a still larger amount of what I may call serious discontent; and beyond that even, among the Catholic population especially, there is a universal dissatisfaction with the state of things in Ireland, and with the course taken by the Imperial Parliament. Now, nothing is more

plausible, hardly anything more reasonable, than to say to an Irishman, 'You cannot be well governed with a Parliament in London to which you only send one member out of six who meet there. Your 105 members from Ireland are submerged, lost, absorbed in the mass of the members for Great Britain, and the Imperial Parliament cares nothing for your voice.' The persons of whom I am speaking, if addressing an Irishman, would say, 'Your first business is to obtain a separation from Great Britain and a Parliament in Dublin. No one country can be impartially and wisely governed by another country.' That is one plain argument offered to Irishmen, and it has in it great force. Now, my opinion is this, that if through a cry of 'No Popery,' or 'Church in danger,' or any other cry, one result of the next election should be to make it impossible in the coming new Parliament to disestablish the Irish Church, every man who has used that argument to an Irishman, or to the Irish population, would find his argument not only immeasurably strengthened, but rendered almost conclusive; and we should find—I don't say more Fenianism, and more of that kind of conspiracy which has exhibited itself occasionally in a reckless form—but we should find in Ireland a far greater discontent and a far greater resolution to achieve, if it be possible, the separation of Ireland from Great Britain. I have never said that Irishmen are not at liberty to ask for, and if they could accomplish it, to obtain the repeal of the Union. I am not now speaking to Irishmen, I am speaking to a meeting composed mainly of persons residing in and natives of Great Britain. I say that we have no right—I am willing to say this anywhere—we have no right whatever to insist upon a union between Ireland and Great Britain upon our terms only. We have only a right to insist that the United Kingdom shall not be severed if we are willing to do full justice to the different nations of which it is composed; and, therefore, there is a question far more important

than whether this man or that man shall be Prime Minister, or whether a particular Cabinet, shuffling and offensive as this Cabinet is, or a more honest Cabinet which may succeed it, should govern the country,—there is a question far greater than whether this or that Cabinet shall be in office. It is whether the people of England have raised themselves to such a height of political intelligence and to such a sense of political justice as to induce them to deal fairly and honourably, and as they would like to be dealt with themselves, by the Irish nation. Until I find that the people of England at their next election shall decide adversely to justice to Ireland, I will not believe them capable of doing so. I will hope and I will speak so far as I am able, and as opportunity may be given me, in favour of the great measure which is now before Parliament, for I believe it to be essential to the unity and the strength and the harmony of the United Kingdom; and I believe that, instead—to take the language of the present Prime Minister, offensive and impudent as it was—instead of dimming the lustre of the British Crown, that it will be regarded in history as one of the most honourable events in the reign of the Queen, if under her mild sceptre this United Kingdom can really be united, and Ireland made as contented and loyal as any other portion of the Empire.

VI.

BIRMINGHAM, OCTOBER 30, 1868.

[On this day Mr. Bright addressed his Birmingham constituents, with a view to the General Election, the Proclamation for the dissolution of Parliament and the calling of another having been lately issued. The principal object of the Meeting at which Mr. Bright spoke was to avow that it was the intention of the Liberal organisation in the borough to secure if possible all three seats for their candidates, and thus to nullify the purpose of 'the Minority Clause.' The plan adopted was and has been successful.]

On Monday last I took the opportunity of giving you a very imperfect sketch of the general policy of the Tory party in national affairs during the last forty years. If you will permit me to-night, I will endeavour to show you what they have done to affect the interests and the convenience of the people of Birmingham during the last two years. I was not aware, until Mr. Jaffray spoke, that the leading candidate of our opponents had referred to my votes on the Reform Bill of last year in his recent speech, for I have not had time to read the speech, and I was not aware of his charges until Mr. Jaffray answered them to-night. I will give you one fact. I will leave alone all the rest. Perhaps you are not aware of this fact, that although the Act of last Session contained no less than sixty-one clauses, there were left in it, when the Bill passed, only four complete and perfect clauses as the Government offered them to the House. Out of sixty-one clauses, forty-one were materially altered, sixteen of them being

borrowed from Mr. Gladstone's Bill of 1866. Only four passed as the Government proposed them to the House. I will tell you what those clauses were. The first was the clause which gives the title of the Bill; the second was the clause which disfranchised the boroughs of Lancaster, Yarmouth, Reigate, and Totnes; the third was a clause imposing a penalty if anybody corruptly paid the rates of any elector; and the fourth was some temporary provision for the registration of some divided counties or boroughs. I should like to ask you how that Bill would have been made worth one single farthing if somebody had not voted against all the evil parts of it as it first came before the House.

But I want to speak to you a little upon another part of the Bill. I mean the clause or clauses which have caused so much suffering and irritation in this town. I have a note sent to me to state that there have been no less than 15,000 summonses issued in connexion with the payment of the rate made last May, that not less than 5,000 warrants of distress have been issued, and that it costs the parish at least 40*l.* a week, or at the rate of 2,000*l.* a year, more than before to collect the rates. It is a very curious thing that Birmingham has been more hardly hit than any other borough in the kingdom by this rate-paying clause, for the principle of compounding—that is, of the landlord paying the rates of his tenants and receiving a certain discount as compensation for that payment—has been adopted for a longer period and to a greater extent in the town of Birmingham, I believe, than in any other in either England and Wales. If my friends below will allow me to state one or two facts to them they will be able to comprehend this question. Once for all, the Reform Bill of 1832 adopted exactly the same principle as the Reform Bill of 1867. I mean with respect to the question of rating. The Reform Bill of 1832 refused the franchise to any occupier whose rates were paid by his landlord, unless the landlord paid the full rate. The Reform Bill of 1867 adopted precisely the

same principle. The Reform Bill of 1832 excluded by this principle 94,000 occupiers of 10*l.* and upwards; but the Reform Bill of 1867 excluded, in its first shape, not less than 476,000 occupiers who were under the 10*l.* value. Now you will see why the Reform Bill of last year excluded so many more than the Reform Bill of 1832. It was because the system of compounding was almost universal below the value of 10*l.*, and above the 10*l.* value it was very partial and very infrequent. The boroughs of England and Wales before this Act was passed were 200 in number, and in 171 of them the system of compounding prevailed—that is, the landlords paid the rates of the tenants, and received back from the parish perhaps twenty, twenty-five, or thirty per cent. in order to induce them to pay the rates. There were only twenty-nine out of the 200 boroughs in which the compounding system did not prevail, but in 171 boroughs 476,000 occupiers below the 10*l.* value would not have been admitted to the franchise if the Bill had passed as brought in by the Government. As the Bill came in, then, it would have excluded nearly all those who have since been included. The 94,000 occupiers of whom I speak as being originally excluded by the Reform Bill of 1832 were afterwards admitted by a single clause, which at my motion and at my instance was inserted in the Bill called the Compound Householder's Act of 1851. Many gentlemen know quite well that under the operation of that little clause in that Bill of 1851 several thousand electors were placed on the electoral roll in this town of Birmingham. I represented to Lord John Russell, who was then Prime Minister, the grievance of the case. He at once consented to remedy it, and Sir William Page Wood, now an eminent Judge, but then the Attorney-General, drew up a clause which I moved. It was agreed to without opposition, and passed through both Houses without a division. When this Bill came in—I mean the Bill of last year—the 94,000 had been admitted by the Bill of 1851. I asked the Government—that is, I asked the

Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister—how he intended to settle the question of the compound householder above 10*l.* who had been admitted to the franchise. I said to him, 'Do you intend to insist upon this difference, that while the compound householder above 10*l.* value is admitted, those of the same class below 10*l.* shall be excluded?' I added, 'This would be a monstrous proposition, to which this Parliament surely will never consent, and which the country can never approve.' What did he say to me in reply? I think I have his exact words. He said that he would settle all this comfortably enough, and that he would do equal justice. But what he really meant was equal injustice to both classes, and he had the audacity to say that he would repeal my clause in the Act of 1851—a clause to which Lord Russell had consented, which Sir W. Page Wood had drawn up, which had passed both Houses without a division, and had given the franchise to 94,000 electors who had been before excluded. The present Prime Minister said that he would repeal that clause, so that no compounder, whether above or below 10*l.*, should have a vote unless he paid the full amount of his rates. He said that his conviction was that the third clause of Sir William Clay's Act of 1851—that is, my clause—had been interpolated, and that it was disapproved of by many high authorities in the House of Commons. I recollect moving the clause, and, curiously enough, the only person who raised any objection to it was your late townsman, Mr. Spooner. He did not know anything about the matter, and when he sat down the clause was agreed to. It then passed through both Houses and became law. Yet Mr. Disraeli proposed to repeal it. Now, this was a most monstrous proposition; but the difficulty was not removed, because if that clause were repealed he was in this position—that the Bill, while it pretended to be a Household Suffrage Bill and to grant a great extension of the franchise, was cutting off the votes of the 94,000 occupiers whom that clause of mine had previously admitted, and at the same time

was excluding 476,000 householders under the line of 10*l*. It was, therefore, not likely that the House of Commons would agree to the Bill if it were in that condition and if it promised to have that result.

There were three ways out of this difficulty, and it is sometimes convenient to have several ways of getting out of a difficulty. Mr. Disraeli might have had a pure household suffrage, without any reference to rating whatever, which, of course, would have been the best. He might, according to the motion made in the House by Mr. Herbert, have extended the operation of my clause which operated upon the 94,000 so as to include the 476,000, and justice would have been done; or he might have done another thing, which he afterwards agreed to do, and which he did, which was to abolish the system of compounding altogether, and which, I think, was the least wise, the most harsh, and the most unjustifiable of the different propositions offered to him. How was that to be done? I dwell upon the facts, in order to deal with the statements which I have seen made in the speeches of our opponents, which show one of two things—either that they know nothing about the matter, or are very careless of the truth. Mr. Hodgkinson, the Member for Newark, was one of the speakers on the Bill. He was on our side, and was anxious to give no vote against any part of the Bill, because we were wishful that in some shape or other the Bill should pass through Parliament, and he gave notice that as the Government would not take any other mode of enfranchising the people, they must insist that the system of compounding should be absolutely and at once abolished. What was said when that was proposed? I will tell you first what Mr. Gladstone said. I understand that our opponents and their orators in the borough and the newspaper writers lay the blame on Mr. Gladstone and the Liberal party for the abolition of compounding, and for the infliction of so much suffering and hardship upon a great many thousands of the

cottage occupiers in Birmingham. This is what Mr. Gladstone said when Mr. Hardcastle made his proposition :—

'My hon. friend offers us, at the expense of an economical and social convenience—at the expense, at any rate, of foregoing an economical and social advantage—he offers us, instead of an extension of the franchise which we conceive to be limited and unequal, equivocal and dangerous, as tending in many parts to corruption,—he offers an extension of the franchise which is liberal and perfectly equal. I am sorry, in deference to what seems an unwise judgment of the House, that it is necessary to interfere with a system of composition which exists throughout the country. I must choose however the lesser of the two evils.'

Afterwards, on another occasion, when Mr. Gladstone made a proposition to discuss the question, he used these words. He said,—

'I have deprecated it all along, and have consented to it as I would consent to cut off my leg rather than lose my life—on the principle of choosing the lesser evil.'

Well, what was the greater evil? It was that there should be no enfranchisement; and but for Mr. Gladstone's opposition to that Bill, supported as it was by me and the great bulk of the Liberal party, that clause might not have passed, and you whom I now see before me, and 39,000 and more outside this building, within the limits of our town, would have been still knocking at the doors of a Reformed Parliament and asking for admission there. The Government—Mr. Disraeli is the Government—and a party by which the Government is supported are solely responsible for that part of the measure. That harshness would never have been inflicted if the settlement of the question had been left in the hands of the Liberal party; and I believe I may say with confidence, that if ever the grievance is remedied, it will be remedied not by the Tory but by the Liberal section of the House. Are you aware of the fact, which I repeatedly stated in the House during these discussions—let every working man who is now about to be or who is really enfranchised, and who is about for the first time to exercise his vote, let him bear this in mind—that the

Bill, until that compounding clause was abolished, would have had this strange effect. In the town of Sheffield, 28,000 householders under 10*l.* would have been admitted to the franchise, because there the system of compounding never prevailed; while in Birmingham, not less noted for its zeal for freedom, deserving no less renown for its services to the Liberals of England than Sheffield, 36,000 under 10*l.* would have been absolutely disfranchised. The Bill as proposed would not have enfranchised in all England and Wales more than 118,000 voters in boroughs. The Bill, when that amendment was added and that proviso agreed to, enfranchised four times as many as the Bill was originally intended to enfranchise.

If I had come here and had said to you, 'We are a very unlucky party in Birmingham, there is an election at Sheffield, 28,000 persons under 10*l.* excluded by the Reform Bill of 1832 have been admitted by the Bill of 1867, whereas in Birmingham 36,000 under 10*l.* excluded by the Bill of 1832 are equally excluded by the Bill of 1867,' I will not ask you what you would have said, but what do you think Mr. Lloyd would have said? Surely he would have said, and with no little truth, that if I had not made my protest against such a scandalous thing I was not worthy to represent the interests of the unenfranchised people of Birmingham. But in the attitude of the Government, and as the case stood in the House of Commons, it was absolutely impossible for any Reformer to prevent the abolition of the system of compounding during the last Session of Parliament, although it has been an extraordinary grievance in many places, and in none has it been a greater grievance than to the population of this town. Mr. Gladstone, in one of the remarkable speeches which he has recently delivered in Lancashire, referred on one occasion to this subject, and said that in his opinion one of the first things Parliament would be called upon to attend to would be the unsatisfactory condition in which the payment

of rates and the possession of the franchise were left. If I were a working man in Birmingham who found myself troubled with this new nuisance, I would trust rather to the sagacity, the love of freedom, the generosity, and justice of Mr. Gladstone than to any qualities of any kind that have been exhibited in connexion with Reform by the Tory party.

I understand that some of those gentlemen who go round to enthusiastic meetings in favour of the Irish Church and a variety of other nuisances tell some of the electors that there was a Committee appointed last Session, on the motion of Mr. Ayrton; that I was a member of that Committee; that I attended a very few times, and took no interest in getting passed any recommendation having for its object a remedy for this grievance. Now, listen for a moment. Mr. Ayrton's Committee was appointed to consider the whole question of rating. But this was only a small portion of the enquiries which it undertook. I consented to be on the Committee, and so long as I could do anything I gave my vote in favour of Mr. Ayrton's propositions, which would have suggested a report to remedy the grievance. I believe there was not a single member of the Tory party who voted with him, and we were out-voted by them. I hope I have shown you clearly the difficulty of the circumstances under which that grievance was forced on you; that the Government and the Government party only are responsible for it; that without Mr. Hodgkinson's clause, without the abolition of compounding, in the then attitude of the Government, one of two things must have happened—either that the Bill must have been wholly lost for the Session, or the great bulk of the householders below 10*l.*—476,000 of them—must have remained without enfranchisement. I did all I could for your sakes in the matter, and have done all I can since, with a view to inform public opinion, and when any rational and just remedy is proposed to the House of Commons I need not

tell you that if you send me there I hope to be there to support it.

Now, having disposed of that preliminary matter, you will give me your attention, I am sure, while I touch upon another point on which you have also been specially hit by the Government and the Tory party in reference to the question which is involved in this resolution. Parliaments in this country are not a new institution, as many of you know. You may look back to your fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers for many generations before you would be able to fix your eye, or your finger, or your minds upon the man who lived and laboured in England when Parliament was first established. Six hundred years are a long time, and if a thing has been found very useful, and, on the whole, very good for six hundred years, I am not so much in favour of change as to wish to get rid of it. But during all that time, whenever the king or any other lawful magistrate has issued his writ to any constituency to return representatives to Parliament, it has been understood that the return should be made by the majority of voices freely given by that constituency, and that the return should be void if it could be proved that any man was returned to Parliament by a minority. I once sat for seventy-three days on a Committee for the purpose of discovering whether the man who had a minority of votes for the Dublin election should not sit as the Member. He alleged that the man who had the majority had a number of corrupt and personated votes, and that, therefore, the minority was really the majority; but no man ever came before Parliament or a Committee of the House of Commons to claim a seat on the ground that he had only polled a minority of the votes. There is no case of that sort which has been maintained, and until lately no such device has been imagined by any man who is acquainted with freedom and the true mode of preserving it.

What do you do at the nomination? You lifted up your

hands just now in answer to an appeal from the Chairman to say that you would like to have the nomination outside. Well, I did not lift up my hands for that; for you must bear in mind that it will be in the month of November, and you will have to stand for I do not know how many hours. The Mayor will have to listen to something which only half-a-dozen people about him will hear, and the Town Clerk will have to read something for about half-an-hour which nobody will understand, and then, with five candidates you will have ten movers and seconders, and five candidates might take us —except for the fact that nobody can hear, and therefore the eloquence will be cut short—all through the day of nomination. I suppose our Chairman will say that I have no business to say this, but I should like you to know all the facts of the case before you come to a decision as to what should be done in a matter of such importance. Now if we have the nomination outside, which in fine weather would be very pleasant and very grand, I dare say nearly every elector in Birmingham will go there—perhaps 35,000 men. It will be certainly a magnificent sight. The Mayor will put before you the names of the different candidates, and you will have to hold up your hands for each candidate as he is named to you, and the Mayor will have to decide which three candidates out of the five have the majority. He will declare that A, B, and C are duly elected, and then possibly—I am not sure of it—but possibly somebody will ask for a poll. But when you hold up your hands, is the Mayor to say to you, 'You must only hold up your hands for two'? Here we are, three candidates on the Liberal side, and under the present circumstances, the law suggests that you should only hold up your hands for two of us, though the law does not say anything about the holding up your hands for two only. Your right at the nomination is as it was before the Act passed, and you will be permitted to hold up your hands freely for the three candidates of your choice. Why is it

that a poll is granted for the day after? Simply for this, to prove whether the show of hands did really express the opinions of the constituency. The candidate who has the minority says, 'I have canvassed all the borough and have got a great number of promises, and I believe if we go to the poll that I may still have a majority, therefore I am not satisfied with the show of hands,' and, Mr. Mayor, I demand a poll;' and the poll is accordingly granted: And how is it that one of you electors, being only allowed to vote for two candidates at the poll, can correct or in any way prove the propriety and the truth of the demonstration at the hustings? Is it not quite clear that our ancient constitution is entirely departed from, and that the innovation which was passed last year is directly in the teeth of all the principles in this matter which have governed our electors for six hundred years past? There are, I believe, seven counties now, or divisions of counties, which are empowered to send to Parliament three Members each, and there are also six boroughs, five of which are to return three Members, and the City of London is to return four, but in all these cases, except in that of the City of London, where one elector may vote for three, he can only vote for two. If this principle is a good one, why not have it all over the constituencies? Is the general policy of the great boroughs so much distrusted that it is necessary to cripple them? Let us suppose that we are to adopt the principle throughout all the constituencies, what would happen in places where there is only one seat? I presume, if the minority is to be represented, that the majority is to be got rid of, or else you must have that sort of two-faced man who can suit two parties and look two ways at once; though he would hardly be able to go into both lobbies at once in a division in the House. And what are you to do in boroughs where there are two Members, and two seats. Clearly, if you give one to the minority the borough is neutralised, and is in the position of many boroughs

of which we now speak with a sort of pity or contempt. It would return one man to say 'aye,' and another to say 'no;' and therefore, the borough would count for nothing, and politically it might just as well be extinct.

But what was the object of this distinction? It was first suggested in the House of Commons by a gentleman whom I have had occasion to speak of here before. But I will repeat nothing of which he may complain. I believe that he is not only dissatisfied with the course which he took then, but that he has repented in sackcloth and ashes ever since. I speak of Mr. Lowe. When the Bill was first going through the House of Commons the clause which Mr. Lowe proposed was not exactly like this minority clause; if possible, it was a still more absurd proposal. It was one which I have already discussed here two or three years ago. He proposed—in this borough, for example—that every man should have three votes, and that he should give all his three votes to me, or divide them among myself and my colleagues, or give them to Mr. Sampson Lloyd. What would have been the result? It would have been just this: that if Mr. Lloyd had been the only candidate on the Tory side, and supposing that he could poll 10,000 votes in Birmingham, if every one gave him three votes he would really record 30,000 votes, and, therefore, although he was a candidate who only had 10,000 supporters out of 40,000, he might come in even at the head of the poll. That, I think, I once described as reminding me very much of a donkey race, where the last donkey is declared to win. But what did Mr. Lowe say about it when he moved his proposition? It was this: he was complaining of the democratic and popular character of the Bill, and he said, 'All our other arrows have been shot; not one remains in the quiver; so that if this does not hit, there will be nothing left but one simple uniform franchise, to be intrusted to and left in the hands of the lowest class of society.' Now, when that was debated in the House of Commons it was strongly

opposed by Mr. Disraeli in, I think, one of the strongest, and, I will say, the most sincere, and therefore the best, speech he delivered during these discussions. I opposed it strongly, as you know, and many others did, and it was rejected by a vote of 314 against 173—a majority of 141 against it. Well, then, when the Bill went to the House of Lords you know what became of some clauses there. The House of Lords has this, to my mind, very foolish habit—when it really cannot do a great deal of mischief, it seems to delight itself in doing a little. They dared not reject the whole Bill, and so they picked a few holes in it, and made it a little worse, and pretended to do something against the popular cause; and Lord Cairns (the Lord Chancellor) moved another resolution, which was passed as it now stands. And what did he say about it? He said it would represent the minority in a borough, which would include the most intelligent portion of the constituency. If it be true that to be most entirely wrong during a whole lifetime of political action is to prove oneself the most intelligent, then there are many of our opponents whose intelligence cannot be called in question. In the Lords this was the result, that the clause was carried by a majority of 142 against 91, being a majority of fifty-one in favour of it. When the Bill came down again to the House of Commons, and we were asked to agree to the amendment, we had on our side that evening a majority of not less than fifty votes, and all the amendments of the Lords, except this, were disagreed to and rejected. The Government had no influence whatever, because they had no help from our side of the House; but when the amendment respecting the minority clause came under consideration, although Lord Derby had denounced it as unconstitutional and said that its mischief could only be limited by the area of its operation, and although Mr. Disraeli had denounced it in stronger language, yet, in order to pass that which the Lords had sent down, Mr. Disraeli brought up the whole tail of his supporters, and, joined

by forty or fifty men from our side, who ought to have known better, passed this odious and infamous clause. It is not a matter of the slightest importance as regards the two parties in the country. The minority clause will not at present, and I believe it will never seriously affect the balance of power in the House of Commons. As yet, as far as I am informed, it is probable that the Liberal party will gain something from that clause, but it may have a very grievous effect in places like Liverpool, where no one knows where the majority lies. Each side will bring two candidates forward, and one of the two twos will be left out; but when it is clearly decided where the majority lies, unless the majority is very large, as I hope it will be in Birmingham, it will put an end to contests altogether, and these large constituencies will become as sleepy and dead as some of the county constituencies, which are under the thumb of the landlords.

I am surprised, very much so, that our two opponents in their peregrinations through the town should have expressed themselves in favour of this clause. It seems to me that the vanity of these gentlemen is of a very peculiar character. One of them will find his ambition highly gratified if he can enter Parliament as the inferior and minority member for Birmingham. The vanity of the other is no doubt amply satisfied by being permitted to appear as a candidate. But if these men, or one of them, does get by any possibility a chance of creeping in through the clause, he can succeed only by crippling and emasculating one of the greatest and one of the foremost of the constituencies in the empire. I do not understand how any elector of Birmingham, unless his politics are of the most rabid, blind, and unreasonable Toryism and Orangeism, can on any pretext whatever support men who have publicly avowed their approbation of this clause. But one of our rivals has expressed a hope that it may be widely extended to other constituencies.

Every man of you comes to this election with one hand tied

behind his back. Every man of you, but for this clause, would have voted freely for three candidates, and you would have carried your men to Parliament with a triumphant and undoubted majority. Even with this clause you are fighting doubtless a successful battle, but it is a battle in which you are obliged to incur the large costs of an election, and to needlessly sacrifice the labour of hundreds and thousands of your fellow-townsmen. No man doubts the opinion of the constituency of Birmingham. I recollect a deputation coming up last year on this very question of three members. It was discussed whether the borough should be divided with two members for one part and one for the other. I said, 'I do not suppose it makes very much difference whether it is divided or not as to the character of the member returned.' And one of your townsmen, a member of the deputation, said, 'If you go to the sea, anywhere you like, and take up a spoonful of water, it will be salt;' and he added, 'if you will return any member from any district in Birmingham you like, he will be a Liberal.' But there are electors among you—and I think in your canvass you ought to make use of this argument—there are electors among you, probably a few thousands, who will vote for candidates willing to support a clause which actually deprives every elector of Birmingham of one-third of his voting power, and may deprive him of much more, because, if you happen to see returned one Tory and two Liberals for Birmingham, you have only one real voice in the House, and therefore two-thirds of your political power will be destroyed. I do not speak of this as a matter of party. I think if I were asked to stand as a candidate for a place which was generally considered Tory, and was asked to come in under this minority clause, it would give me a feeling of disgust that I can hardly put into words. I would not stand or sit for such a place on any terms, or go into the House of Commons and get up to address the House as the representative of the constituency

of Birmingham, when I knew that I only represented a small portion of the constituency, that never had the right to have a voice, and never would have had but for the detestable trick or wanton innovation put by the House of Lords into a Bill for the reform of the House of Commons. Manchester is in the same difficulty; Liverpool is in the same state. In London the constituency can only vote for three members instead of four, as their ancestors have done. I hold that clause to be the most outrageous heresy against a popular representative system which was ever propounded in the Legislature. I do not care whether it has the support of aged statesmen, or dreamers, or of men who fashion political theories in their closets, I say that it is a fraud on the great constituencies. I say further, that it is the duty of every Liberal elector to represent to every candidate who supported that clause his own opinion of its wrong, of its unconstitutional character, and of its injustice, and to urge him by all the arguments he can bring to bear upon him to recant his opinions and to vote for the abolition of that clause. There were great men—men for whom personally I have great affection—who voted for that clause. I hate the clause no less for that, and I think I have the right to say that it should be the duty and is the duty of every Liberal constituency—I do not say to cashier men for one error they may have committed, but to urge them in a friendly and earnest manner to consent to the abolition of that clause on the first opportunity when it shall again come before Parliament. Do not let us have any new-fangled ideas. The fancy franchises we kicked to the winds; the minority clause, which ought to have come, not from the honest representation of the people, but from Bedlam, or a region like that, should have the same treatment. If the men at Birmingham want to know what freedom is, let them look back to the lives and histories of their forefathers. They knew how to lay foundations, broad and deep: it is for you to protect those

foundations and to build wisely upon them. There is not one of the great fathers of English freedom who lived two centuries ago, who, if he had been in the House of Commons, would not have said 'No' as emphatically as I did to this odious clause. Seeing it—seeing now, that in this hall and this constituency, we have no power to-night to put an end to this clause or to repeal it—seeing that it must be tolerated as it best may until the power that made it shall again unmake it, let us not forget that we have a duty in regard to it. Every Liberal throughout the United Kingdom is asking, 'What is Birmingham going to do with the minority clause?' If every part of the sea is salt, if every district and every ward of the constituency in Birmingham is Liberal, do you, by united action, by hand and voice, and heart and vote, tell the House of Commons and the whole country that there shall never go, with your consent, in spite of all the machinations of these dreamers and schemers of minority representation,—that no member or representative of the Tory party shall, with your consent, enter the House of Commons as the representative of this town. And the more this is known throughout the country—the more this is felt in the House of Commons—the more certainly you may take this comfort to your hearts, that by this election—great and transcendent triumph as we believe it will be—you will put an end shortly to this odious infringement of your liberties, and add one other great and permanent security to English freedom.

VII.

EDINBURGH, NOVEMBER 3, 1868.

[On this day the freedom of the city of Edinburgh was presented to Mr. Bright by the Lord Provost, Mr. W. Chambers, the eminent publisher. In the speech accompanying the action, the Lord Provost made allusion to the necessity of supplementing Parliamentary reform by 'the promotion of a comprehensive scheme of national education, without which,' said Mr. Chambers, 'all blessings are nugatory.']

My Lord Provost, although I have had a long experience and much practice in public speaking, yet there are times when I feel myself to be overmatched by the duty of the hour; and this is one of those occasions. I do not expect to be able to say exactly what I think, or all that I think; but I may say, with the most heartfelt sincerity, that I am under deep obligation to you, and to the Magistrates and Town Council of Edinburgh, for the honour you have done me, and to this audience for the kind reception which I have met with this morning. Last week one of my acquaintances asked me what was intended by the freedom of the city, whether there was anything in it that was useful or valuable, any privilege or right that a man could care for. I told him that, as I understood, there was nothing in it which could be put into the scales and weighed, nothing that could be measured by rule; but there was something in it much more precious, if rightfully considered, than silver or gold. There was the free offer of their approbation by the authorities and by the population of the most intelligent and renowned city in the United Kingdom to me, who had been for more than twenty-five years

labouring assiduously in what I believe to be the public service. I assured him, as I assure you, that after the priceless value of the approbation of my own conscience, there can be nothing that I value so much as the approbation of the intelligent and thoughtful among my countrymen.

In the resolution of the Town Council, out of which the proceedings of the day have sprung, there are phrases which almost make me blush, and to which I find it difficult to refer. I am there described as an orator and a statesman. Now, more than thirty years ago, when I was very young indeed, in my beginning to think about public affairs, in reading the prose writings of John Milton, I found a passage which fixed itself in my mind. This passage time has never been able to take from my memory. He says, 'Yet true eloquence I find to be none but the serious and hearty love of truth.' And I have endeavoured, so far as I have had the opportunity of speaking in public, to abide by that wise and weighty saying. So far as I am able to examine myself, during the thirty years that I have been permitted to speak at meetings of my countrymen, I am not conscious that I have ever used an argument which I did not believe to be sound, or have stated anything as a fact which I did not believe to be true. I have endeavoured, further, always to abstain from speaking on subjects which I had not examined and well considered, and perhaps it is because I have endeavoured to attend to these rules that what I have said has met with some acceptance, and perhaps in some quarters has been influential with the country. As to the title of statesman, I may say here what I said many years ago in the House of Commons, that I have seen so much intrigue and ambition, so much selfishness and inconsistency in the character of many so-called statesmen, that I have always been rather anxious to disclaim the title. I have been content to describe myself as a simple citizen, who honestly examines such public questions as affect the public weal and honestly offers his counsels to his countrymen.

The resolution refers to services which I endeavoured to render long ago to the cause of free trade. It is about twenty years ago since that question was supposed to be settled; it is so long ago that I believe the young men—the men from twenty to thirty years of age—in this day are for a great part almost entirely ignorant of the tremendous struggle which was necessary in this country before we could make free trade a fact. In a sentence, I may say that I worked at it for seven years, for five years almost without interruption, and that I did nothing else but work for free trade during these years, being in alliance, as you know, with one of the most remarkable men that our country has ever produced, and one of the best men that any one now living has ever known. When I look back to him whose name must ever be foremost in any history or record of that struggle, when I consider his remarkable industry, his wonderful sagacity, his enlarged information, the combined force and gentleness of his character, his most persuasive speech, when I look back upon his transcendent merits, I confess I am amazed that it took all his powers, and the energy, the labour, and the resolution of thousands besides, to repeal the Corn Laws. I say I am amazed that on so clear a question it should be necessary to make so great an effort in order to bring Parliament and the people to comprehend their true interests.

There is a sentence which I recollect in a letter, I think, that was written by the celebrated Mrs. Somerville, which ought of itself to have abolished the Corn Laws, but which did not. But I dare say it helped to form opinion on our side. She says:—

'Surely as much food as a man can buy, with as much wages as a man can get, for as much work as a man can do, is not more than the natural, inalienable birthright of every man whom God has created with strength to labour and with hands to work.'

Nothing can be more simple than these words, nothing more true, nothing more conclusive. It is a complete and

unanswerable condemnation of a law which had been passed by Parliament. This law for thirty years made periodically an artificial—not a real—famine in the country, and it required the greatest agitation—moral agitation, political agitation—that this country has ever known, an agitation which was backed by the most terrific famine which has visited any part of Europe during the last five hundred years, before it could be overthrown. Now, when we look back to the history of that contest, if I had been one of those who supported that law, I think it would have made me ask myself whether it were not possible that my method of examining public questions was not wrong, and whether I might not be just as wrong upon many other things as I had proved to be in my judgment about the Corn Law. I am one of those who have never believed that there is anything very mysterious in the art or knowledge of politics; and that what we call statesmanship—honest statesmanship—is not an abstruse and difficult branch of knowledge. Most of us, when we come to consider a public question, are able to strip it of all the things which do not really belong to it and get at the pith and kernel of the matter. I think that our intellects are so much on a par, and that, as a whole, we are so anxious to act honestly and rightly, that on almost all occasions we may be able to come to an early and a wise agreement as to the course which the public should pursue. In the course of my political life there have been several great questions which have interested me, and on each of which I have been astonished that I found myself at variance with so many of my countrymen, and I have not been less delighted afterwards to find that, by-and-by, we all seemed to agree; but, unfortunately, the agreement came, occasionally, too late, and the misfortunes, which had been perhaps foretold, or which were inevitable, happened, and it was only after the misfortune that we were able to agree as to what ought to have been done.

There is a question in which I took a great interest some

years ago, and in which any number of Scotchmen have taken a great interest for the last hundred years. It was one discussed in Parliament very much from 1853 to 1858. I refer to the government of 150,000,000 people in India. It is a subject of great importance, especially to the more comfortable and wealthier classes; for there are hardly any of their families who have not sent some members out to make their fortunes in that distant country. Now, fifteen years ago the Government of India was the most extraordinary Government in the world,—I should say, the most remarkable Government that ever had been in the world. It was called a double Government. It consisted of a number of directors of an extinct trading company, a company that was always bankrupt. The directors, who were bred in corruption, and who practised it during their tenure of office, and who, in point of fact, may be said to have lived upon it, neglected everything they ought to have done except the collection and expenditure of taxes. And to that curious Government was added a Minister of State, who was appointed to control the said directors. He allowed them to do nearly everything evil that they liked to do, and he added to their evil-doings some other evil-doings of his own. To a system like this there were numbers of persons in this country—thousands, perhaps millions—who assented. They imagined that it was possible to go on governing a country containing 150,000,000 of people, composed of more than twenty nations and speaking twenty different languages, of different religions and different ways in every particular, under such a system. I have heard a Cabinet Minister of repute speak for five hours, not only in defence of that system, but make a speech which was a glowing eulogium of it, while he implied that everybody who proposed a change was to be considered an intermeddler, for that no one ought to call the system into question. Within five years after that speech was made, there came a change; for it may be said, as was said in the olden times, that when they planted

and builded, and were married and given in marriage, that the flood came—in his case it was the Mutiny—and swept the thing away. Still, although it swept much away, it did not establish everything that was necessary, and, in my opinion, the future of that great country is still neglected by what we call statesmen, since its future is almost wholly unprovided for.

I will not go further into that subject, but will step on to another question, in which we all take an interest, some of us a very painful interest, and that is the Eastern question. When this country thought it necessary to go into deadly conflict with Russia—I shall not argue the matter, I do not profess to argue about anything to-day, because this is not a place in which controversy is desirable—but if we look back to that time, we must feel that the action of the public was adopted under the influence of much ignorance, prejudice, and passion. Probably there is not one man in a thousand in Great Britain or Ireland who could stand at this table and give any decent, connected, rational, intelligible narrative of the events that brought about that war, or the facts on which it could be justified. I always said myself that no country justice—and there are many of them who are not very particular—would send any man to gaol for three months on evidence such as the people of England—I beg pardon of a gentleman in Glasgow who writes to me on the subject, and who objects to the term England when we are speaking of the United Kingdom,—on evidence such as that on which the people of Great Britain and Ireland went into that unhappy struggle. The result was that 250,000 men were killed or died during the conflict; that hundreds of millions of treasure created by the industry of the nations who were engaged were squandered; that the armaments all over Europe and this country have been maintained at a higher rate ever since; that in this country we have found our military expenditure increasing by 10,000,000*l.* a year—and 10,000,000*l.* in

twenty years comes to 200,000,000*l.*—besides the money spent on the war itself. But this is not all. We find that the difficulties are as great as ever; that Russia is stronger than ever, for Russia has manumitted her serfs, and that Turkey is not stronger, but weaker, despite the efforts made to save her.

There is however one pleasant thing to think of, and that is that the tone of the Foreign Office is greatly changed. Not long ago I read a little speech which was made by Lord Stanley to a deputation from the Peace Society, and the other day, at a dinner given to the American Minister, the noble lord made another speech, which was framed carefully on the model of the speeches which my wise friend Mr. Cobden and I made years ago. I do not blame Lord Stanley for his language; I rejoice in it. I rejoice in thinking that the old traditions of the Foreign Office are being forgotten, or are allowed to go into oblivion, and that even there, where I am afraid sound principles are long in finding a resting-place, we are beginning to be more rational than our grandfathers were, and than we ourselves were twelve years ago.

There is yet another question that has interested us greatly. I refer to the war which for four years ravaged the States of America. Now, there, if we could have divested the subject of things that did not belong to it we might all have agreed about it, whereas we greatly disagreed. Many of the influential papers in London, some in Glasgow certainly, and probably in Edinburgh, held opinions, and advocated them, that were different from mine. The rich classes, and even the middle classes to a great extent, seemed to me to lose their heads on that occasion. Now what an extraordinary thing it was, that nearly four years after the time when we had put down insurrection with the most relentless hand in India, we should immediately take the side of a great insurrection which intended to break up a free nation—and, a nation of our kinsmen—an insurrection which made war

against the freest and cheapest Government in the world, an insurrection the very basis of which was a perpetual establishment of human bondage. If we could have been persuaded that the Americans were not arrogant and insolent, that they were not becoming so great a power that they might be led to meddle with the politics of Europe—if we had not been assured that it was better for us that a great people should be divided and suffer from perpetual quarrels and difficulties on their continent—if all these false and immoral considerations could have been stripped from the facts, if they had been seen as they really were, if the pith and kernel of the situation had been kept before you, there is not an Englishman, not a Scotchman, not a Christian man in the whole world who would have said he hoped that the insurrection would succeed. And now at this hour—I am not sure it is not the very day on which we are met—there is going on over the whole of these States a great contest like that which we are approaching, when the Executive Government for the next four years will be determined by the vote of thirty-five millions of people. Let us hope—I hope—that the result of this great verdict may be to give continued power, and with the power I hope there may come continued wisdom, to that party which has been in favour of freedom, and which did what was done to restore the union of that great country.

In your observations, my Lord Provost, you refer to the subject of Parliamentary Reform. I shall say but a sentence or two upon that, for perhaps it may be necessary to refer to it at another meeting in the course of the week. But if men had considered the true nature of the question we should not have fought so long about it. There may be here many persons—I hope there are—who belong to the Conservative political party in this country. I know many of them for whom I have great respect, and with whom I can discuss this topic with the greatest freedom, and sometimes, also, with advantage. But in a country like this, which has had

Parliaments for six hundred years; when England was, as I have often described her, the mother of Parliaments, when we had established them over the United States of America, when we had spread them over Australia and at the Cape of Good Hope, when we advocated the establishment of Parliaments and Constitutional Governments in all the States of Europe—it was surely a childish idea that a Parliament could be said to represent the country when five millions of the people were wholly shut out from the franchise. The facts were so clear and the meaning of the facts was so important that one would suppose that every man, by whatever he called himself as a party man, would have looked at them and said, 'This cannot last as it is; we had better consider it fairly, and we must effect some settlement which will be satisfactory to the nation.' The facts and arguments were such that the reason of the case bore down everything which was opposed to it. But nothing was done, till the cry went on more loudly and more strongly till at last everybody listened to it, and at last everybody capitulated. At this moment we are all agreed that there was a necessity for a wide extension of the suffrage; we have got rid of a great obstacle to the consideration of other questions, and I hope we have removed such a cause of difference as will never again embitter public discussion in this kingdom.

There is yet one other matter which I shall not presume to argue, and this is the question of Ireland. We feel, all of us, whatever be our opinion as to specific remedies, that there is a certain weakness in the Government of the United Kingdom, and that this weakness is the condition of Ireland and the state of opinion in that country. Of the fact there can be no doubt. It is not my opinion only, but is the opinion of the members of the present Government and of their supporters, and of people of all religions throughout the country. It is not confined to the Presbyterians of Scotland, to the Protestants of England, or to the Catholics of

Ireland. Every thoughtful, honest, and Christian man throughout the United Kingdom would be glad if he himself could be clear about the mode by which that state of things might be changed. Five years hence, or ten years hence, what will it seem, this great question? People will look back upon it just as we look back now upon free trade, or as, in fact, we are beginning to look back on Parliamentary reform. We are all agreed that the ugly hobgoblin which used to frighten some people is no object of terror at all, but a very respectable sort of creature. So with regard to the Irish question. If we got rid of prejudices and false notions about Protestantism and Popery, notions which really have nothing whatever to do with the subject, and simply look back at the pith of the matter, if we divested it of those things which are mere delusions of the past, we should all agree that it is necessary to adopt and carry out the practical policy which has been sanctioned in the Parliament which is now expiring, and which many persons confidently believe will be sanctioned by the Parliament which is about to be created. I am sorry to see that some of our friends in England are insisting that if you do a certain thing in Ireland you must therefore do it in England; that an English Act will follow inevitably from an Irish Act. Now I venture to predict that within ten years, when anybody looks to what has been done in Ireland in order to find arguments as to what should be done in Scotland or England, you will find our friends making this answer. They will turn round and say, 'No,' in the language of the lawyers, 'the Irish Church is not a leading case.' In point of fact Ireland is a special case, and you have no right whatever to argue that what was necessary in Ireland will be even expedient in England.

And now with regard to another Irish question—that of the Irish land. Here is a matter of great difficulty, one which, no doubt, before long the people of the two kingdoms will be asked carefully to consider. If the land of Scotland

were in the hands—almost all of it—of proprietors of the Roman Catholic religion, if they were absentees and in a sense foreigners, if they gave none of their tenants leases, if they never expended money in any permanent improvements on a farm, I would like to ask you what would be the kind of content which would prevail among the agricultural population of Scotland. It would be that kind of content which we call discontent. You would have a state of things in Scotland which would cause an incessant agitation until the Imperial Parliament had found some mode of remedying the grievances complained of.

You have, my Lord Provost, mentioned a question in which I know you take great interest, and that is the freedom of the Press. I referred to that the other day in speaking to my constituents at Birmingham, and I said I thought that the change which has been made within the last few years with regard to the laws affecting the Press was a change so valuable, and productive of so much good, that I scarcely knew anything which had been done in our time that has exceeded it. There can be no doubt that through the whole of the United Kingdom, by the abolition of all the taxes on the Press, there was set agoing at once, everywhere and intensely, a process of education, which I believe is more important than almost all other processes of education throughout the kingdom; for I believe that a free Press is just as necessary for political liberty as free air is for our natural lives. The question of education, to which you have also referred, is one to which I suppose all men now—and I hope all women—are turning their attention. It is a question which is rendered difficult because we will not take it up on its own merits. We have some of us—I have not, but I have found a very great number of people who have—a very stupid idea that it would be wrong to teach and give a child reading and writing and the ordinary—what shall I call it—machinery of knowledge, unless we can at the same time give him the religious opinions

which we ourselves hold; and not only the religious opinions, for there is not much difference in religious opinions, but very often all the unessential details which Churches all over the world have built up into their different systems. But it will soon be put to the people of the United Kingdom whether this question can be solved by us, as it has been solved elsewhere. It has been solved throughout the free States of America; and throughout the Southern States, which have recently become free, it is also being solved. It has been solved in Canada, in British North American possessions. It has been solved in the Australian colonies, and it is solved in many of the States of Europe. We have done so many things, that after all I hope we shall begin to feel that we can do even this. Considering our position, and how much we have been in advance of other countries in other respects, I believe it to be a most discreditable fact that we have had less attention paid to the education of the great bulk of the people of this nation within the last hundred years than in almost any other Christian or civilised nation in the world. It is a very great discredit to the governing classes of this country, and it is a very strong argument, which I felt myself at liberty always to make use of when I urged that the governing power should no longer remain in the hands of a class, but that it should be transferred by Parliamentary Reform to the great bulk of the nation. Well, after having said all this, to what does all I say come? It comes to this, that there is no great mystery in these political questions; that if we will get rid of what, if we examine them, we know to be prejudices; if we will get rid of attendant circumstances, which really have nothing to do with the real question at issue, we shall find that every real question is a very simple one; and that if we put it to the standard of common sense and common morality, the people will not find it difficult to be of one accord and to do all that can be done by legislation and administration in order to improve their natural position.

The changes that have occurred have been great changes. I heard a gentleman talking of them this morning, who said, 'There is no use disguising the fact that we have been passing through and are even now passing through a revolution.' It is quite true; but a revolution of such a kind as history will be glad to dwell upon. If we find during the last twenty or thirty years how good these changes have been, surely our nerves ought to be a little strengthened, so as to be able to venture even on considering the wisdom of other changes. If those changes are, on the face of them, sound and necessary—as those of which I have been speaking have been—we ought surely to have the courage to look them fairly in the face, and not, by immediately rousing party-spirit and heat, treat them as if some of our countrymen were offering something dangerous or hostile to the interests of the people. The century in which we live, the middle of which we have passed, is one which has been remarkable for the eventfulness of its changes, and so it will be regarded in all future time. There is a great battle going on at this moment, and, without exaggeration, we may say that it is a battle with confused noise, although it is not a battle which the prophet described as 'with garments rolled in blood.' There is a confused noise throughout the country, from John O'Groat's to Land's-end. All over Great Britain and over Ireland men are discussing high questions—questions which are to affect the unity of the Empire, our own condition, the condition of the posterity that are to follow us, and to colour all the narratives of the future historians of this kingdom. Let us then in this battle of discussion bear our part; let us avoid heat and passion as much as we can; let us strip from all these subjects that which does not belong to them; let us grasp with all our might the true meaning of them; and let us honestly endeavour to find a true solution for whatever difficulties beset the path of the nation. I am thankful beyond what I can express, when I review my political life,

that I have been permitted to bear some part in changes the results of which will act, I trust, beneficially for ever; and I am permitted to be thankful, and to thank you and the magistrates and council of your renowned city, and all those at this meeting, for the approbation which you have given of my labours and for the signal honour which you have shown me to-day.

VIII.

EDINBURGH, NOVEMBER 5, 1868.

[On this day Mr. Bright was elected an Honorary Member of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. Mr. George Harrison, Chairman of the Chamber, in congratulating Mr. Bright on being thus elected, stated that the Chamber had elected only three Honorary Members—Sir John Sinclair, the distinguished Scottish economist, in the last, and Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright in the present century. In the evening Mr. Bright addressed an audience of working men, and on a vote of thanks being offered him for his pains in acceding to their invitation during a contested election, made a brief speech which concluded his addresses on this occasion. The speech printed here is that which was addressed to the working men.]

I RISE for the purpose, first of all, of expressing how greatly I feel indebted to the gentlemen of the Edinburgh branch of the Reform League and of the trades of Edinburgh for the kindness with which they have prepared and presented to me the addresses which have been read. I do not accept those addresses as in any way binding those who have presented them to an approval of all the course of my political life. I accept them merely as tokens of the belief of those from whom they come that whether we have agreed, or whether on some occasions we have differed, they at least believe that I have acted honourably and conscientiously, as far as I know, for the best interests of the country.

It is about ten years since I last spoke at a public meeting in Edinburgh. Some who are now present were doubtless present on that occasion, and they will feel with me that in

the ten years that have passed much has happened, and much has been changed. At that time the Government presided over by Lord Derby was in office, and was engaged in attempting to prepare a Reform Bill for the coming Session of Parliament. That Reform Bill was framed upon the principle that the Ministry would not consent to what the Government of that day called 'any degradation of the franchise.' They would have no lowering of the barrier at which people were to be admitted to the vote. The Bill failed, as it deserved to fail, and the Government were expelled from office, as they deserved to be expelled. Coming down to eight years after this—to 1866—the party of whom I have spoken, being the Government of ten years ago, objected to a Reform Bill introduced by Lord John Russell and Mr. Gladstone, and resisted it on the ground that they were not willing to consent to such a degradation of the franchise as should admit householders in towns who were occupiers at the value of 7*l.* at least to the vote. They succeeded in defeating the Bill, and the Government resigned, and the same gentlemen immediately came into office, and though they had been sensible that any degradation of the franchise would be almost the ruin of the country, that its degradation to a 7*l.* rental was so perilous an experiment that they dared not consent to it, in the year 1867 they undertook to 'degrade the franchise' to the level of the householder.

The words 'degradation of the franchise,' as you know, are not mine. I am using the language of those gentlemen in order to express what I believe will be found, instead of a degradation of the franchise, to be a great elevation of the people. We have got, then, and we need not exactly discuss how it has been effected, what may be called a popular and democratic—in fact, a Republican representation, so far as the boroughs of the United Kingdom are concerned. The principle of popular representation in Parliament, as it is adopted in the colonies, and in the States of America, has

been conceded. Several boroughs have been disfranchised because they were small; towns have been erected into new boroughs because the towns were large; counties have been divided because they were populous, and the general principle has been admitted that we should make some approximation to the distribution of seats according to the population of the constituencies. Besides this, everybody can see that another question is coming forward for settlement—one which possibly may not excite so much interest in Scotland as in England, Wales, and Ireland. It is, however, one which is closely related to the representation of the people. This is the great question of the ballot.

The fact is—and I do not say so with any expression of scorn or with any feeling of triumph—the aristocracy of England which so lately governed the country has abdicated, and its most boastful leader, Lord Derby, its chief, in its name, and for it, has capitulated to the people. One hundred and eighty years ago there was a revolution in England. The revolution of 1688 had this effect. It stripped the monarch of absolute power, and, pretending to confer it upon the nation, conferred it mainly upon the nobility. The Bill of 1832, combined with the Bill of last year, gave us another revolution. Power has not been taken from the Crown and given to the nobility, but it has been taken from the nobility and has been given henceforth and for ever to the people. The form of aristocratic power yet remains. In every country the possessors of great wealth are likely to have power. I am not complaining of this. But I am stating a fact, which must be plain to all. But although the influence of wealth is great, the spirit of the country has changed, and the centre of power has been moved. We are, in fact,—do not let us attempt to conceal it from ourselves,—standing on the threshold of a new career. Being there, we need no longer have recourse to the arguments which we have often heard from platforms in times past, such indeed as I sometimes have been ready to use.

There is no longer a contest between us and the House of Lords; we need no longer bring charges against a selfish oligarchy; we no longer dread the power of the territorial magnates; we no longer feel ourselves domineered over by a class;—we feel that denunciation and invective now would be out of place; the power which hitherto has ruled over us is shifted. We now have to appeal to you, to address our arguments to you, to couple facts—if we are capable of doing so—with wisdom, and, if we may, to counsel you, so that you who are now part of the government of the country may show in the acts which you do the wisdom which you have learned. The fate of this great nation is in the nation's hands: come weal, come woe, the responsibility of the future must rest with the mass of the people; for they are now admitted, at least within the boroughs, to a large share of representation, and thereby of political power.

But all is not done. There are some matters which have to be adjusted; for to confer the franchise is only to give every man a key by which, if he is wise, he may unlock the treasures which are open to a well-governed people. This very Reform Bill, so extensive and so remarkable as it is, has still many deficiencies. I do not intend to go into details to show what must be done in order to bring the county franchise into greater harmony with the borough franchise. These are details that must come up before long for discussion before the people, and before Parliament; but there is one point to which I will refer, which I have indeed already mentioned, and this is the shelter of the ballot. I see in the papers a speech by a gentleman for whom all who know him must have the highest and deepest feeling of respect. I refer to one of the candidates for the city of Westminster, Mr. John Stuart Mill. No man is more fair in argument than Mr. Mill, no man is more willing to admit the force of anything that an opponent offers for his consideration; but it is not necessary that we should believe that Mr. Mill can know

every question better than everybody else—and, in saying that, I say no more than he would be most willing to allow—but in a speech which Mr. Mill made within the last two days to some of his constituents, he says that he opposes the ballot. He thinks—I do not quote his words—that public duties should be performed publicly; that by and by there will be morality and power enough to put an end not only to corruption, but to compulsion; and he compares the free and open exercise of the ballot to the duty of a judge in a court of justice which is open to the public eye. It appears to me that the comparison is not a good one. The judge in open court has no compulsion brought upon him; he is independent; the Crown, which appointed him to his office, cannot remove him; he is not expected to deliver a judgment in accordance with any feeling that he may have, but one which is wholly in accordance with well-known and recognised rules of law. If instead of stopping at the Bench, Mr. Mill had gone into the jury-room, he would have found that the jury, which is just as important in this country in a trial as the judge, does sit apart from the public eye, and more than that, that it is considered a gross violation of confidence if any juryman should convey to the public a knowledge of what has occurred in the jury-room. I am not able to accept these glowing pictures of the immediately improved morality of the people. If it be wise not to bring in the ballot because men without it will become strong enough not to need it, it might be equally wise to dispense with the judge and jury and the police; for (who knows?) at some time—it may be remote—men may become strong enough in virtue, honest enough in their hearts, not to violate the written or the moral law, and judges and juries and courts of justice may no longer be required.

I look at the condition of things in this country and in Ireland, where, as you know, a county contest is little less than civil war; in Wales, where all the people, with scarcely any exception, being Nonconformists in their religion and

Liberal in their politics, have hardly any opportunity of expressing their own opinions, and hardly any influence in their county representation. I look again at all the great constituencies of the kingdom which have been created under this Bill, and I am forced to conclude, as the new machinery of electing a Parliament comes into working, that it will be proved to every man, who is in favour of public order at our political contests, that the ballot is absolutely and indispensably necessary to secure order as well as liberty.

There is another question which is now before the public which has received much consideration, and, I believe, a wise verdict from the people of Scotland. That is the Irish policy of the Liberal party in the late Parliament. We are about to try a great experiment, one of the most notable experiments ever attempted by any Government, or by any Parliament—we are about to see whether we can win over the affections and sympathies of a discontented and almost hostile people by one grand, generous, and wise attempt to do them full and complete justice. It is unnecessary in Scotland to point out how much an alien Church is necessarily a root of bitterness; your history teaches you all this in a more marked manner, perhaps, than it has been taught to any other country. I feel that I need only refer to the appeals which have been made to you by the Liberal candidates throughout Scotland to gain your thorough and hearty consent to the great attempt to establish perfect religious equality in Ireland.

But there will be another question by no means without its difficulties when this question of the Church of Ireland is settled, and that is with regard to the ownership and tenure of land in that country. You know nothing of this matter in Scotland from your own experience. Although you have the misfortune to have the land of your country in very few hands, still the men who own it have been not a little alive—as Scotchmen are generally supposed to be—to their own interests. They have conducted their business

as landowners upon principles altogether unknown in Ireland. They have granted leases of reasonable duration, and I believe have given good encouragement to their tenants. They have expended their own capital on the erection of buildings, and in the making of certain permanent and necessary improvements. The Scotch farmer entering upon his farm could carry on his business with some hope of success. But you are in a very different position from the Irish. In Ireland the land really is not in the possession of what I may call native proprietors, or natives of the country, to any large extent. It seems to me to be an essential thing for the peace of any country that its soil should at least be in possession of its own people. I believe that in Ireland it will be necessary to adopt some plan—and I believe there is a plan which can be adopted without injustice or wrong to any man—by which gradually the land of Ireland may be, to a considerable extent, transferred from foreign, or alien, or absentee Protestant proprietors, to the hands of the Catholic resident population of the country. I anticipate that until something of this kind is put into process of operation, we shall not find such tranquillity and content in Ireland as we would wish to see. But in speaking of the Irish land question, I may say one word about the land question in the United Kingdom. Perhaps many of you are not aware that from year to year, from ten years to ten years, the owners of land in the United Kingdom are becoming a smaller and smaller number of persons; that the laws which we have in this country, having been based and supported by the territorial powers, are laws whose express object it is to maintain great estates in the hands of great families, and to make the land not of Ireland only, but of Great Britain, a monopoly in the possession of a few. And the purpose of all this is that these great families by the possession of vast estates may possess and wield great political power, and remain, as they have been until now, the great

governing party and power within this realm. But if you look seriously at facts, you will see that certain forces are constantly operating which tend to the accumulation of land; and that certain other forces tend as certainly to its dispersion. Those which tend to its accumulation will easily suggest themselves. Some men think it wise, and certainly agreeable, to put their property into land. Some people feel like Dr. Johnson, who advised a friend of his to take a walk of two miles before breakfast, and said, if possible, it should be upon your own land. Others like investments in land because they like to dabble in agriculture; others because the investment in land in this country gives a certain social influence which repays them for the moderate rate of interest which they receive. On the other hand, you will see that there are also influences which assist the dispersion of landed property. For instance, a man may wish to have an investment in English land, which pays him three per cent., put into American land, which will pay him seven per cent.; or he finds it expedient to get rid of a portion of his estate in order to procure capital for his son; or he may have been unfortunate in some monetary speculation, and therefore may find it necessary to sell land; or that which happens to all men happens to him—his life comes to an end, and then the property may possibly need to be sold. Thus you will see that nature has provided certain forces which tend to the accumulation of estates in land, and certain other forces which tend to their dispersion; and I maintain that the true policy of the Government and of the law—the just policy of the law—is to leave all to the forces of nature, whether they induce the disposition to accumulate or bring about the necessity of dispersion, to their unrestrained operation. Thus when laws are made by which men who wish to buy property will be able to buy it, some in large and some in small quantities, the monopoly which exists in this country will be brought to an end.

I do not propose that there should be any law by which

estates should forcibly be cut up and divided among families. I would leave the owner, the man in possession of the estate, perfect freedom to decide whether he will leave the property to one, or divide it among the whole of his children. The law of division maintained in France and in many countries of Europe is believed by most people in those countries to be a good law; but it appears to me to be contrary to the principles of political economy, and I prefer the operation of the law as it exists in the United States of America, which rejects the law of France and rejects also our law. But I conceive that before long it will be the duty of the people of England, of the electors of England, and of Parliament to remove from the Statute-book what is called the law of primogeniture, to allow land where it is left by a person who makes no will to be justly and equally divided by the law as property other than land is now divided, and that the present practice of entails and settlements should be limited to persons who are living when the deeds are made. I believe that it is not a wise thing to sacrifice the public interests to family pride or to the notion that you must build up great families who are to have great resources, only that they may exercise a paramount authority in a free country.

There is another question which has been discussed a good deal of late, which at least twice a year to some people, and every day to most people, is of some interest. This is the question of Government expenditure. The people of the United Kingdom have carried the burden of heavy chains so long, that they have become used to them, and almost seem to think that the chains are part of their natural limbs. We are paying now, this very year, taxes amounting to 70,000,000*l.* sterling. I wish I could show you what 70,000,000 or even what 1,000,000 means; but I have never found a man who could comprehend the meaning of a million. Out of these 70,000,000*l.*, 26,000,000*l.* go to pay the interest on the debt contracted by wars which have been waged by

this country between the time of William III and the time of the Russian War. These wars have seldom been undertaken for any purpose whatever in which the whole people of this country had a real interest. Your fathers having waged the wars, spilled the blood and spent the treasure, it comes on us, their children, and on our children and their children, to pay the interest for an enormous debt. But we are not content with this burden. We have learnt so little by the past, that we are paying this year, I think, rather more than an equal sum, rather more than 26,000,000*l.* from the fear that there may be another war, or that we may be induced again to meddle in some great European contest. We are maintaining an army and a navy at a cost far greater than at any previous period in time past, although we have confessedly—I quote the words of Lord Stanley, the Foreign Minister—a sufficient guarantee that we have altogether abandoned the ancient theory of the balance of power, and that we do not intend henceforth to use the sword in any question in which the honour and interest of England are not distinctly involved.

This year, I think, the army cost about 15,000,000*l.*, and the navy over 11,000,000*l.* Let me tell you how many there are of every kind of soldier and half-soldier in the country. If I am not mistaken, there were voted 140,000 men for the army, for the navy 60,000, making 200,000 regular and permanent troops, which we have been told are absolutely necessary, so necessary that the Government that preceded this present Government were most negligent of the defences of the country in maintaining less. Of the militia there are 128,000 men, of the Volunteers 162,000. In Ireland there is a police force, equal in training and armament to any troops, of, I believe, rather more than 12,000 men. Then there is, as you know, a considerable force of police in all our great towns, and in nearly all the counties. Take them altogether, they make a very formidable sum. These persons are withdrawn from industry to what is supposed to be

necessary defence, and you need not wonder that the sum which we pay is as large as that which I have described, to say nothing of the loss to industry. Let me further illustrate what I am saying by calling your attention to Ireland. There have been at times, and certainly not long ago, 30,000 soldiers in Ireland. I do not know how many there are at this moment, but if they are not there they are somewhere else, and I dare say somewhere where they are not wanted. But we have in Ireland, besides, the 12,000 armed police which I have mentioned, an army which is paid for out of the taxes of the United Kingdom. The system of the Government of Ireland, of which the Tory party is enamoured, is one which requires this great military force in order to keep Ireland contented, or if it fails in that, to keep it from the constant exhibition of rebellious tendencies. If I were one of the Conservative party—I use the term as it is used in the Tory newspapers—if I were one of that party I really should be ashamed to talk of Ireland: I should feel that if there be a spot on the earth's surface where my principles have had full play, it is in that unhappy country. The territorial magnates have had all the power there, an Established Church has been supported by all the authority of Great Britain; the magistrates in the country in great majority have been of the Protestant persuasion; everything has been upheld there which the most resolute Tory could desire to see. But with what result? That policy has been followed, as it must be everywhere and inexorably, by widespread discontent, and a resolution on the part of the people that they will shake themselves free from such a Government if at any time the power of Great Britain is not strong enough to control them.

And now let us look at the facts in a reasonable manner. What does the 26,000,000*l.* spent on the army and navy mean? It means something equal to the debt of 800,000,000*l.* sterling which our forefathers spent in folly and wrong, and

the interest on which your taxes pay. It means that there is virtually another sum of 800,000,000*l.*, the interest of which you are paying in taxes in order to keep up a great army and a great navy. And when? not only in a time of profound peace, but when no country in the world menaces or distrusts us; when there is not a cloud in the sky; when, if ever there was a time at which the United Kingdom may be said to be in tranquillity and peace, the time at which I am speaking is that time. If you look back over the history of England from the time of the Revolution—from the time of William III to the end of the Russian War—you will find that almost every war in which we have been engaged was based on the utter folly and absurdity that this nation is called upon to maintain the balance of power in Europe. I hope that we have abandoned that policy and given up that delusion; that we have got free from that aberration, and are at last in our right mind. May we not, then, calculate that if we keep out of the former hallucination, if we retain that sound mind, if we for the next 50 years, or 100 years, resolve to maintain our present policy of not meddling in the affairs of Europe, that we shall be at least as free from wars in 100 years to come as we might have been in the 100 years that are passed. If that be so, if there be any hope of it,—and I believe there is,—I ask why we should go on paying 26,000,000*l.* sterling a-year for the cost of an army and a navy?

I quoted a passage yesterday from perhaps the foremost name in English political history—from John Milton—I may now quote another. He describes these charges for war as draining the veins of the body to supply ulcers; and so from your veins, from the sweat of your brows, from the skill of your brains, and the industry of your hands, from that which you have worked for to furnish your houses, to clothe your families, to supply their wants—from all these this 26,000,000*l.* is gathered up, not once in 100 years, but every year, to sup-

port the army and navy, to maintain and keep up a policy which we have utterly abandoned. If you read the papers, which tell us nearly everything—I find they sometimes tell us things that do not happen—you will find they say something about the West Indian and North American fleet; something about the Pacific squadron; and something about the naval force of Her Majesty in the China seas; something which has happened to ships of war on the coast of India, or at the Cape. Then you hear of Lord Clarence Paget, as here, or there, in some part of the Mediterranean, with a prodigious fleet. You hear further that there is always a great Channel fleet which is necessary for our home protection. But there is no necessity whatever for these fleets on our coast, or for traversing every ocean as they do now. There is no other country that finds it needful to have great fleets and squadrons everywhere. I do not know whether it is a dream, or a vision, or the foresight of a future reality that sometimes passes across my mind—I like to dwell upon it—but I frequently think the time may come when the maritime nations of Europe—this renowned country, of which we are citizens, France, Prussia, Russia, resuscitated Spain, Italy, and the United States of America—may see that those vast fleets are of no use; that they are merely menaces offered from one country to another; that they are grand inventions by which the blood is withdrawn from the veins of the people to feed their ulcers; and that they may come to this wise conclusion,—they will combine at their joint expense, and under some joint management, to supply the sea with a sufficient sailing and armed police, which may be necessary to keep the peace on all parts of the watery surface of the globe, and that those great instruments of war and oppression shall no longer be upheld. This, of course, by many will be thought to be a dream or a vision, not the foresight of what they call a statesman. Still, I have faith that it will not be for ever that we shall read of what Wilberforce called the noxious

race of heroes and conquerors; that what Christianity points to will one day be achieved, and that the nations throughout the world will live in peace with each other. How much can we spare of that 26,000,000*l.*? I think one-half of it was considered enough thirty years ago when the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel were in power. Heavy taxation always is unequal, for when the burden is heavy the powerful classes are always endeavouring to shift it from their own shoulders on to those of somebody that is weaker. It is impossible to say how great would be the gain to the commerce and manufactures, to the shopkeeping and distributing interests, to artisans and labourers throughout the country if one-half of these 26,000,000*l.* could be saved. There is not a man or a woman in England that would not reap some advantage from such a change. If this wide extension of the suffrage does not bring the people to consider these questions, and cause them to urge in Parliament greater wisdom and greater economy, I shall be greatly dissatisfied with its results.

In the address which was given to me a reference was made to another question, not less important than any of those I have mentioned. That is, the question of education. I presume that in Scotland, where you have had more education than we have had in England, you are in favour of having more still; for education is one of those things of which the more extensively it is spread among the people, the more a people demand. In England we are superior to other nations in some things: we have great personal freedom; we have a press that can write almost anything it likes; we have a platform on which men may speak freely; we have great success in manufactures; we have immense superiority over almost all countries; but it is singular that in the education of the people, of the working classes, of those who live by wages, we are much behind very many of the civilised and Christian nations of the world. We have any number of

churches and colleges, but we have a great scarcity of schools. I sometimes compare the state of things in New England with the state of things in Old England. New England began to be colonised about 250 years ago: the very first colonists who landed on its shores established at once a system of education. From that day to this that system has not only constantly flourished, but it has been constantly extended and gathered strength, and now the population of New England is descended from no less than eight generations of skilled and intelligent men and women. In this country, as we all know, unhappily, there are at least some millions whose forefathers for eight generations have been entirely deprived of all education whatever. You may imagine—you cannot imagine—the difference between two people, one which has been educated for 250 years, and another which has been almost entirely shut out from education. Only last night, when I came to Edinburgh, I sat by a lady who has not long ago returned from America. She was a lady of your country. She spoke with delight of what she had seen there with regard to education, and with pain and sorrow at the neglect of it which is shown by the population of the United Kingdom. She said that nobody would think of speaking of any class, as we speak, as being partially, or large portions of them as entirely, uneducated. There is a possibility—and we shall find it out, our children will see it, I hope—that the millions of this country who have not been educated—for you can see the fact in the countenances and lives of many—will hereafter have, if not a large, at least a reasonable and necessary culture. I frequently used an argument in favour of a wider suffrage to the following effect:—I said that this great neglect was the fruit of the government of the country by a small section or class; that if we were to transfer the power from the small section and extend it over the nation, the instincts and sympathies of the nation would at once demand that a wide and thorough system of, at least,

elementary education should be speedily extended to every part of the country. I have dwelt on three great topics. I had no notion that the mere passage of a Suffrage Bill would content everybody; for, after all, there is not much difference in holding up your hands at the hustings and going in to have your name put down on the poll-book unless something is to follow. That something, I hope, we shall all consider carefully and wisely, and that in all our future proceedings we shall bear in mind that upon every one of us, as electors, there is a great and solemn responsibility. The three great questions before us are these:—The monopoly of the land, which I believe to be the cause of great and serious evil. It drives vast numbers of the rural population into the towns, where sometimes they are not wanted. It subjects the rural population over wide districts of territory to the rule of one man, as you know; and it keeps the rural population back in the condition—I speak of the labourers—which they were in for a hundred years ago or more. Rents have risen, the incomes of the landed proprietors doubled, trebled, and quadrupled—aye, in some cases, increased tenfold. What the labourers were at one time they remain, not altogether, but very much the same as they were. Let us protest against the monopoly of the land. I hope that we shall have the united voice of all the free constituencies in the country before long demanding of Parliament that there shall be such a change made as brings the truths of political economy and the law of justice within reach of all.

Next, there is an enormous expenditure, and in some things onerous inequality of taxation. I had this morning the opportunity of meeting the members of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, and I took occasion to tell them how great a credit it was to them that so far back as the year 1820 they had presented an admirable petition to Parliament in favour of the principle of free trade, and I suggested to them that they might find it to be their

duty to endeavour to get what I call a free breakfast-table—to get rid of the heavy duties upon tea, coffee, and sugar. The expenditure of the country might easily be reduced so much as to allow a reduction or repeal of these duties. The equalisation of certain other duties—I refer to the legacy and succession duties—might go a considerable way towards the means for extinguishing these duties. You may rely upon it, that if the people say that these taxes are unnecessary and unjust, and if the people protest against them, and resolve to get rid of them, you will not find the slighest difficulty in finding a Chancellor of the Exchequer who will do the work.

The last of the three questions is the existence of ignorance, of almost hopeless ignorance, among the poorest classes of the people. It is not an extraordinary thing that notwithstanding our great industry, our wonderful machinery, our world-wide commerce, and the great wealth of the country, there should be found so large a mass of pauperism in the kingdom. I read the other day a speech made by a member of the House of Commons, and a member of the present Government, or who was until the last Session. The Secretary of the Poor Law Board expressed his apprehension that the pauperism of the country was increasing so fast that it would be nearly as bad as it was some thirty years ago. I think there must be something very rotten if such a result occurs. Since I have taken a part in public affairs, the fact of the vast weight of the poverty and ignorance that exists at the bottom of the social scale has been a burden on my mind, and is so now. I have always hoped that the policy which I have advocated, and has been accepted in principle, will tend gradually but greatly to relieve the pauperism and the suffering which we still see among the working classes of society. I have no notion of a country being called prosperous and happy, or of being in a satisfactory state, when such a state of things exists. You may have an historical monarchy decked out in

the dazzling splendour of Royalty; you may have an ancient nobility settled in grand mansions and on great estates; you may have an ecclesiastical hierarchy, hiding with its worldly pomp that religion whose first virtue is humility; but, notwithstanding all this, the whole fabric may be rotten and doomed ultimately to fall, if the great mass of the people on whom it is supported is poor, and suffering, and degraded.

Is there no remedy for this state of things? If Government were just, if taxes were moderate and equitably imposed, if land were free, if schools were as prominent institutions in our landscapes and in our great towns as prisons and workhouses are, I suspect that we should find the people gradually gaining more self-respect; that they would have much more hope of improvement for themselves and their families, that they would rise above, in thousands of cases, all temptations to intemperance, and that they would become generally—I say almost universally—more virtuous and more like what the subjects of a free State ought to be. The solemn question as to the future condition of a considerable portion of the labouring classes in this country cannot be neglected. It must be known and remedied. It is the work upon which the new electoral body and the new Parliament will have to enter. It is a long way from Belgrave-square to Bethnal-green. It is not pleasant to contrast the palatial mansions of the rich and the dismal hovels of the poor, the profuse and costly luxuries of the wealthy with the squalid and hopeless misery of some millions of those who are below them. But I ask you, as I ask myself a thousand times, is it not possible that this mass of poverty and suffering may be reached and be raised, or taught to raise itself? What is there that man cannot do if he tries? The other day he descended to the mysterious depths of the ocean, and with an iron hand sought, and found, and grasped, and brought up to the surface the lost cable, and with it made two worlds into one. I ask, are his conquests confined to the realms of science? Is it not possible that another hand, not

of iron, but of Christian justice and kindness, may be let down to moral depths even deeper than the cable fathoms, to raise up from thence the sons and daughters of misery and the multitude who are ready to perish? This is the great problem which is now before us. It is one which is not for statesmen only, not for preachers of the Gospel only—it is one which every man in the nation should attempt to solve. The nation is now in power, and if wisdom abide with power, the generation to follow may behold the glorious day of what we, in our time, with our best endeavours, can only hope to see the earliest dawn.

IX.

BIRMINGHAM, NOVEMBER 10, 1868.

[On November 10 Mr. Bright addressed a deputation of the Birmingham gun-makers. The object which these manufacturers had before them was to criticise the action of the Government in establishing manufactories at Enfield and elsewhere, and generally to condemn the policy of Government in undertaking such commercial or industrial operations as can be carried out adequately and safely by private enterprise.]

If we were to judge by the advertisement under which this meeting has been assembled, we should conclude that it was one not only of a peculiar character, but that it had reference to private, or sectional, or trade interests, rather than to the great interests of the country. But I understand that they by whom this meeting has been convened have no intention whatever of urging upon their present or their future representatives any course in regard to any particular trade or industry which shall not be consistent with the true policy of government and the true interests of all portions of the people. I say this because if it were otherwise I could be no advocate of such a trade or such an industry; nor would I undertake to plead its cause at this meeting or to this constituency. The speech which has been made by our Chairman comprehends probably the pith of all that can be said upon the practice which has roused the feelings of the particular trade by which this meeting has been assembled. I am not minutely acquainted, as you may suppose, with the details of that trade,

or with the course which the Government has taken with regard to it, excepting so far as I have heard it occasionally discussed during various sessions of Parliament.

I have always been of opinion that it is a great mistake for the Government to undertake the character of manufacturers; I believe it is so with regard to the building of ships; I believe it is so with regard to the manufacture of clothing for the army; I believe it is so likewise in the manufacturing of guns; and I recollect that, so long ago as forty years since, a Committee of the House of Commons passed a resolution which seems to me to include nearly all that can be said upon this matter. In the year 1828 a Committee of the House of Commons reported thus:—

'The Committee are not disposed to place implicit reliance on the arguments which have been urged by some public departments against contracts by competition and in favour of work by themselves; the latter plan occasions the employment of a good many officers, clerks, artificers, and workmen, and not only adds to the patronage, but to the appearance and importance of a department. Nor can the Committee suffer themselves to feel any prejudice against the contract system. By reference to some instances of failure they believe that most cases of failure may be attributed to negligence or ignorance in the management of contracts, rather than to the system itself.'

Now, if I were to put into one sentence my opinion upon this matter, I should quote the sentence which I find in a speech,—the most able speech on this question, I suspect, ever spoken in the House of Commons by my, and your, lamented friend Mr. Cobden. On the 22nd of July, less than a year before his death, he delivered a speech, from which this is an extract:—

'This is the principle I have always advocated, that the Government ought not to be allowed to manufacture for itself any article which can be obtained from private producers in a competitive market, and if we have entered upon a false system in this respect, we ought, so far as possible, to retrace our steps.'

Now, if all the speakers to-night devoted their attention exclusively to this topic, they would not be able more thoroughly to examine the whole question and explain it

more clearly than is done in this speech. And possibly it might be worth the while of all the artisans of Birmingham who are interested in this question to obtain copies of this very small pamphlet, and to distribute it among such members of the new Parliament as shall come in their way in the course of the next fortnight, with the view to giving them full information on the question. Ever since I have been in Parliament I have held the opinions which are proclaimed in that speech, and on all occasions when there seemed any possibility of doing anything in that direction I have acted upon that opinion.

You must however bear in mind that that which you complain of is merely a very small branch of the whole question. The expenditure of our Government is excessive in every department, and wherever it is excessive there grows up rapidly a powerful interest which is not in harmony with the interests of the people. Every man who lives on the public expenditure, whatever be his services, comes naturally to have an interest—a personal interest, which, if he is not very careful, takes sides against the interests of the tax-payer. We have in this country, out of our expenditure, our military expenditure only—I mean on the sea and land forces —we have a taxation amounting to more than 26,000,000*l.* per annum. There live upon that 26,000,000*l.* so vast a body of men—men looking for better wages, better salaries, higher promotion, that they form necessarily a most powerful influence, acting constantly upon the Executive, and against the interests of the taxpayer. And I can assure you that the House of Commons, hitherto, seems to be wholly incapable of contending with this power. In point of fact, many of those who have seats in the House are interested in this expenditure; and if you will follow the manner in which the expenditure is determined on and the estimates are proposed, you will see how difficult it is for three members for Birmingham, or for thirty, to make much difference in this

matter. The heads of departments—the Horse Guards for the army, the Admiralty for the navy—bring forward certain proposals with regard to expenditure, which are laid before the Cabinet, but the public are never heard at the Horse Guards or at the Admiralty. Men are there who are certainly heard, men whose heads are filled from morning to night with the grandeur, the glory, and the extent of the Services, but most of them do not appear to have any idea that it is of the slightest importance that money is spent or saved; for they do not seem to know that a tax taken from the people is so much taken from their comforts. I am not charging them with having any ill intention towards the English people. But they are out of all contact with the people; their minds are filled with their own offices, their own duties, their own responsibilities; they are surrounded by an atmosphere which shuts them altogether out from hearing the complaint of the taxpayer. Thus, looking only at what they conceive to be their own duty, they have no motive to set any limit to the amount of expenditure which they are prepared from year to year to recommend to the Cabinet.

When these propositions come from the Army and Navy Departments of the Cabinet what happens there? It does not need to have been a member of a Cabinet to know what happens. It is this. The saving of the public money is hardly anybody's business. The head of the Army Department, the Secretary of War, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, these are men who probably have only recently been put into their offices. Until they were put there they knew nothing about them. They have to depend upon what is said to them by those below them. The Cabinet, as a whole, is disposed greatly to leave each particular department to the head of that department, and we all know that in the House of Commons, with its mob of generals, and colonels, and admirals, and captains, and the friends of such, it is far more easy to work the Parliamentary machine by a lavish

expenditure of money than it is to procure, or to promote, or to insist upon any due system of economy. They make things easy by what is called greasing the wheels. I recollect, only last Session, speaking to a very eminent member of the Conservative side of the House about the policy of the Government, and he said that their policy was to make the thing work by giving a little money all round. The observation was made especially with reference to that policy for Ireland which they ventured apparently to propose, but which afterwards they not only shrunk from, but denied that they ever had proposed. Well, when the Cabinet has determined upon certain estimates they are laid before the House, and the House always accepts them. I believe there is no man now in the House of Commons who ever remembers a time when an estimate was refused, I do not mean that a salary of 300*l.* a year has never been struck off, but I mean that any considerable, any sensible sum, that any estimate that could be felt and was connected with the military services has never been struck out by the House of Commons. The House cannot go into the details. Suppose I were to get up and endeavour to go into the particulars of some of these military votes. You would read that the Secretary of War, or the Secretary of the Navy, or the First Lord of the Admiralty has risen to answer me. Sometimes I have heard what I considered a flat denial of facts, and an answer which I have known to be untrue; but if there was not a flat denial, there would be details given and opinions of officers connected with the Services uttered, and a general muddle of everything, and the House naturally —I am not blaming the House for it—would take the opinion of the head of the department on matters of detail rather than the opinion of a non-professional, independent and critical member, such as I might happen to be.

Let me give you an illustration. When I went into the House of Commons one of the most notable members there was a man whose name deserves to be held in lasting remem-

brance—I mean Joseph Hume. Mr. Hume was in Parliament, I suppose, for nearly forty years, and he devoted himself with the assiduity, the industry, the minute investigation, the power of work of ten ordinary men to this very question. But though I dare say there might be some wrong things which he prevented from being done, and some good things which he recommended should be done, no one was more sensible I believe than he was that at the end of his long career, with all his measureless services of intention to the people, the actual result of his labours was almost nothing at all. The fact is, the system of our Parliament is such that the Estimates, whatever they are, as a rule are always agreed to, and that more and more of the taxes—which means the hard earnings of the people—are put year by year into that bottomless and insatiable pit into which so many hundreds and thousands of millions have heretofore been cast. I have not referred to any figures in preparation for this meeting, but I suppose that within the last twenty years or little more the expenditure of the country has risen by nearly 20,000,000*l.* per annum. I suppose that since the time when the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel were at the head of the Government—a few years after the passing of the Reform Act of 1832—the military expenditure of the Government has been doubled; and all this when the foreign policy of the country has been reformed and changed, when we do not pretend to undertake to settle all the affairs of Europe, when we are told continually that Her Majesty's relations to other States are of the most amicable nature, and there is not so much as the slightest cloud in the sky. The military expenditure grows notwithstanding. I believe that it is bigger this year than it ever has been before in time of peace, and, unless there is a formidable outcry, it will grow bigger and bigger every year. The Services are always asking for more. You remember the complaint against Oliver Twist was that he asked for more. But then Oliver was badly used.

In this case they who are always asking for more are not badly used, are always active, are always working on the Government, and meeting the Government at every turn. The members of the Government as they move about Westminster meet people connected with the army and the navy and the civil service every hour of the day. The whole power of these expectant services is brought to bear incessantly upon the Government; and if there is no power on the other side, what course is the Government likely to take? Of course, it will yield to the force which is incessantly brought upon it, and you, the uncomplaining people, work under heavier and heavier burdens, till at last you may be roused to a sense of intolerable oppression, and may bring about some terrible political catastrophe.

What is wanted is an entirely new system, and I will in a few sentences tell you what that system ought to be. In future the formation of the Estimates should no longer be left to be determined by the Admiralty, the War Office, or the Cabinet. There ought to be an honestly chosen committee of the House of Commons. The House pretends to hold the purse of the nation—it does so, indeed, but its own hand is always in it. Surely, instead of having 650 gentlemen, who for the most part knew nothing about the matter, to determine these claims, all the Estimates should be referred to a fairly selected committee of the House of Commons, and that committee ought to go into the consideration of the whole matter, to hear opinions, to take evidence, and make a report with regard to every important item in the Estimates which it presents to the House. For the first ten or twelve years after I entered the House of Commons I took great interest in the Estimates. I sat very near Mr. Hume, and I did what I could to aid him in his efforts on this subject; but I found out that it was all in vain. In fact, there is no greater delusion imaginable than that any single member of Parliament can make any sensible difference in the public expenditure.

You often hear complaints that members do not examine and criticise the estimates. I have read newspapers which make a great point of finding fault with me. They are fond of saying, 'Why does he not, instead of declaiming against the expenditure in the Birmingham Town Hall, attend the committees of the House and fight the Estimates?'. The man who tells you that is either a knave or a fool. Mr. Hume fought the Estimates for forty years, and they always grew, even in his hands, and the fighting cannot be done in the House of Commons under the present system. So conscious is nearly every one of this that at present, in committees of the House, when the Estimates are before it, scarcely anybody attends to listen or criticise, except the representatives of the army and navy, and their criticism almost always goes in favour of increasing rather than of diminishing the expenditure. But we should not accept what the Horse Guards say or what the Admiralty says, or what the Cabinet says, but we ought to have an honestly chosen committee of the House of Commons, to whom these matters should be referred, and that committee should recommend whatever changes it thinks proper after taking evidence upon every point. I am of opinion that the time is coming when the people of England will begin to discover that this question is of very grave importance. Seventy millions a year of taxes—70,000,000*l.* a year. I got a letter to-day from somebody; I have not brought it with me. It is from a gentleman who has read what I said the other day at Edinburgh. He tells me that I do not know anything about 70,000,000, for I do not know correctly how much 1,000,000 is. He sent me a calculation of how many bank-notes it would take, one piled on the other, and pressed down. He infers that it would reach as high as the Monument. But there is a simple way of understanding the matter. If you will take these 70,000,000*l.*, and think what it comes to in ten years—700,000,000*l.*, and in twenty years 1400,000,000*l.*; 700,000,000*l.*

since I first stood on this platform, to speak to you about Reform,—where did the 700,000,000*l.* come from, think you—you men, with your skilled hands or with your great and untiring industry, and other men, your employers, with their capital and their skill? Why, surely, out of the industry of the United Kingdom. The 70,000,000*l.*, the 700,000,000*l.* of the ten years, have been expended, and every single sovereign of the mass that was not expended on the true needs of the country was a sovereign wrongly wrung from you, which, had it remained with you, would have added sensibly to the comfort of your families and of your children. Bear in mind, too, that the pressure of taxes is always felt most heavily by the poorest of the people; the rich are never ruined, and they rarely even suffer sensibly from taxation. They may pay so much in the pound of income-tax, or so much upon a house-duty, but there remains always what gives them abundance of food, clothing, and shelter; but the pressure upon the great body of the people—those whose living is their labour and their wages—is much heavier, and upon the poorest of them it is absolutely crushing and destructive. It lessens the means of employment because it absorbs capital, and it lessens the rate of wages because it diminishes profit. It therefore necessarily lessens the manufacturing power and narrows the commerce of the country.

The Governments of Europe are pretty much all alike, and they will all come probably, unless they reform, to the same fate. At this moment there is scarcely a Power in Europe which does not extract from the people the utmost farthing it can get. Take the case of France; if you were to trace the course of that Government from 1815 till now, you would find its history is constant deficit, constant increase of taxation, constant accumulation of debt. There is no jeopardy so great to a monarchy as that which arises from a constantly growing debt and a constantly extravagant expenditure, and perhaps, when one is in a mood which is half vindictive and half

hopeless, one may take some consolation from the fact that every Government which heedlessly wastes the means of its people is sowing the seeds of its certain destruction.

I have been a little struck as I looked over your newspapers to find that this subject has occupied certainly very little, perhaps no space at all in the reports of the speeches of our opponents. One of the candidates for the inferior position of minority Member for Birmingham complained, on a recent occasion, that I had not read the speech of his colleague in the candidature, and that I had not, as I was in duty bound, undertaken to answer it. The fact is I am too busy in these days to dwell very much upon works of fiction. The speeches of Mr. Lloyd are what I would call dull fiction, and the speeches of his colleague, though not less fiction, are certainly of a rather more sparkling and sensational character. But I turned this morning to the papers that I might have an opportunity to-night of satisfying our friends that I had at least read what was reported, even if I might fail to answer it. I find, however, that the reporter gave more prominence to the speech of the chairman than to the speeches of the candidates. It was a disappointment to me, though I have no doubt he exercised a sound discretion. Now, the chairman was Mr. Councillor Lowe, who, I suppose, being a member of the Town Council of Birmingham, must be a man at least of certain standing and repute. This gentleman appears to believe in the hobgoblin he sets before us. He talks in the most moving terms to his audience. He says, 'Never go back from the bulwarks of your civil and religious liberties,' and that I presume is the Established Church of Ireland. I do not believe myself that the Established Church was ever the bulwark of our civil or religious liberties either in England or Ireland, but I wish Mr. Lowe the next time he speaks would tell us—because, you must remember, the hobgoblin that he sets before us is the Church of Rome—I wish he would tell us where the Church of Rome in Eng-

land gets all its converts from. I do not know that I have met with more than one or two Nonconformists who have left the Church of their fathers and gone over to Rome, but I constantly meet with men who, having been brought up in the bosom of the Established Church of England, are now within the fold of the Church of Rome; and you all know—you all read the papers, and you all know—that there is scarcely a week, and never a month for years past, that you have not heard of some person of eminence, or of wealth, or of family, or of culture, or of standing in some way or other, who has not left the Church of England and gone over to Rome. Even the families of the households of the hierarchy are not free from the invasion of the power of Rome. What would you do—what would you think—what would the general of an army think if his sentinels were deserting, if the regiment upon which he particularly relied was constantly going over to the enemy? At least he would not have the effrontery to say that his regiment was the especial bulwark of his cause.

May I ask you why it is—and if you, gentlemen, do not answer the question, I will try and answer it—why it is that this melancholy fact is so? In the Established Church of England and Ireland—but I will confine myself to England, because I suppose those gentlemen would not care much about Ireland if they did not fear about England—in the Church by law established, and I suppose by the Canons of the Church, every clergyman is a different order from the laymen of his own Church, and from you, and such as you and myself, who are Dissenters. He enters the Church, it may be, at three and twenty years of age, and he is told that he is in a certain way higher and better than other men. The orders into which he enters are indelible. To enter into holy orders is a great thing, but when once done cannot, I believe, in this country, be undone. A man in orders is not allowed to come to Birmingham and enter into one of your

trades, and if you were to return him to Parliament the doors of the House of Commons would be closed against him. He is a man different from other men, and taught that he is so, and as among the clergy there is at least as large a proportion of men with human frailties as in other classes of the people, the clergyman necessarily feels himself elated, elevated, distinguished from others. Even the humility that ought to belong to his order and his calling is scarcely able to keep him from those failings. He argues that what the Church of Rome believes, for the most part, or in some sort, is to be defended from the Prayer Book, and thus step by step he wanders out of the state of mind in which he originally was, until he gets into one in which he cannot be satisfied or contented, except he advances further and lands in the Church of Rome. Do not imagine that in saying this I am attacking unfairly any member of the Church of England, or that I mean anything that is unfriendly to the Church of Rome. We are not discussing theological questions here. I am however endeavouring to show cause for that strange tendency towards Rome which has been witnessed of late in the Church of England, and to point out to you how it is—for you know that it is so—that the Church of England, as far as its clerical ranks are concerned, is not just now a bulwark against the inroads of Rome.

Our friends are not very fair in the speeches to which I have referred. They do not keep to accurate statements. I should say that this is a very mild way of putting the case. They deny, for example, that which I stated here, and that which you know to be true. They deny that the grievous irritation which is felt by so many of the occupiers in Birmingham was caused by the head of the Conservative party, and insinuate that it was the work of the Liberal party in Parliament. I forgot the other night, when speaking upon the point, to quote a passage (of which I can now only state the substance) from a speech made by the present Prime Minister

at the time when Mr. Hodgkinson moved the abolition of the system of compounding in or for the payment of rates. Mr. Disraeli, to the utter astonishment of those who sat near him and of all his followers who came in afterwards, said that Mr. Hodgkinson's proposition met the view of the Government, that in point of fact it was their original policy, and he added, that if they had been master of the situation (which meant that if they had got their own party into a sufficiently tractable condition) they would have proposed it originally to Parliament. And yet these gentlemen go about to meetings in your town and state that which I know, and which they ought to know, to be utterly untrue.

They have another grievance just now. I think that I ought to be held, politically at least, to be a person of almost stainless character, because I find that when they have anything to say to the working men about me they generally go back to rather more than twenty years ago. I could not go back nearly so far if I were speaking about them. They tell the working men of Birmingham that I was one of the opponents of the Factory Act. Well, if it were true that the Factory Act was all good, and that the opponents of it were all wrong, it still would not be wondered at that I—who was myself concerned in the trade which was to be mainly affected, I who represented the great city of Manchester—it would not be wondered at much if I took in some degree a one-sided view of that question. I do not pretend to infallibility; but this is a fact which they never care to tell you—that when that Bill was introduced into the House of Commons, about the year 1845, at a time when the manufacturing interests of the country were assailing the Corn Law with constantly increasing force of argument, it was thought a very lucky thing that a Protectionist Parliament should be able to assail the manufacturers through the Factory Bill. When Sir Robert Peel was in power, on the first great vote which made it apparent that that Bill was going to pass,

the whole Protectionist party, joined by some of the Whigs, voted against us and against the Government of Sir Robert Peel; the Protection party for the reason I state, and the Whigs for a reason that was no better—that they might join some of Sir Robert Peel's supporters in worrying him. And now you will probably be surprised to hear—I have no doubt that our Conservative-Liberal-Constitutional candidates will be surprised to learn—whom, I believe in that very year, I found with me when I went into the lobby against the Factory Bill. I am not positive as to all the men, I speak merely from memory, and I have made no recent reference to the particulars, but I believe I was in the same lobby with Lord Derby and Lord Chelmsford, then both in the House of Commons, with General Peel, with Sir J. Pakington, and many other leaders of the Conservative party. Perhaps it was bad company, but at least I think the supporters of those gentlemen now ought to admit that, if they have nothing since then to lay to my charge, my character will at least bear comparison with these eminent chiefs of their party. And bear in mind, too, that the great party which on that occasion voted for that Bill, voted in the same Session of Parliament to keep your loaf small. They had not much affection for the working man when with one vote they diminished the size of his loaf, and with another vote they lessened the number of hours during which he was permitted to earn it. Why, as to short time, there is no man in England who has ever been more in favour of short-time work than I have. My own hours of work are sometimes far too long, and I believe that is true of the great majority of the people of this country, but I believe that if the Government of England had been in past times prudent, economical, and just, and even if it were to become so now, every man in England might have his daily labour lessened by not less than two hours without the slightest diminution of his comforts.

But the argument of our opponents, the tenour of their

speeches, the whole course of what they say to the constituencies in their canvass, seems to me consistent with the pitiable and mean condition in which they are. They are seeking to enter Parliament not by the open door of the Constitution of England, but to wriggle in by a crevice, and it is nothing to be surprised at that in their meetings they should descend to arguments which are consistent with the position to which they aspire. Down here they say they are Liberal-Conservatives—I am not sure whether it is Liberal-Conservatives or Conservative-Liberals—they take the garb of the Liberal party as far as they dare, but on their way to Westminster, if they go so far, there will be an entire transformation, and the Liberal-Conservative at Birmingham—so liberal that he does not know where his Conservatism is going to—when he gets to Westminster and to the floor of the House of Commons will be found sitting among the real old true blue Tories. Look at their desperate condition. The other day the Rating Clause became their great test. Was it not in the old Reform Bill? and was not Lord John Russell in favour of it? Most happy are they when they can find Lord John Russell in anything wrong. Now they are all for household suffrage, pure and simple, without any test whatever. One of them is against the law of primogeniture. I am against the law of primogeniture; but I will undertake to say that when this man gets to Westminster, if he gets there, he will take his seat among those who hold that the law of primogeniture is the foundation not only of the House of Lords, as an independent portion of the Constitution, but really of the whole Constitution itself.

Then, I suppose to make way with some other men who are able to see all round them, he is also in favour of what he calls a permissive ballot. Well, I do not know what the permissive ballot is. We have heard of the Permissive Bill. It is difficult to say whether the great and good object which this measure professes to further is likely to be helped by it, and

the difficulty is increased by the permissive character of the Bill. But the permissive ballot I do not understand. What we want is the ballot. We do not want that any man should go to Parliament for us who should speak with hesitating voice upon a great subject like that. Compare them with us. We are not beating down anything; we are not coming down week after week, to one meeting after another, and offering something more; we are not like a trader behind a counter who asks his customers, 'Is there anything else that you would like?' we are not yielding one principle after another, for this simple, this miserable object, that, without reference to the public service or to our own consciences, we should be sent up as members for Birmingham to the House of Commons. No; and more than that, we do not go about the town applauding a clause which has cut off one-third of all the power of every elector of the town of Birmingham. Is it not amazing that there should be in Birmingham as many men as would fill a small room who would listen with patience to two candidates who tell them that they are delighted that one-third of the voting power of every man is cut off, and that they think it very fair? Mr. Lloyd says that until some other mode can be devised of representing minorities—that is, of letting men go into Parliament in the name of a constituency which is not willing to send them there—unless some other mode can be devised, he thinks this mode is very fair, and he shall support it. I am thankful to say that I have not gone down so low as that yet. I stand before the constituency with whatever may be known of me during a political life extending nearly to thirty years. If my opinions are not sound in your view; if my public life has not been faithful to my own convictions and to your interests; if you think you can be better represented, it is your duty to make a change. Whatsoever you decide of course will be absolute law to me, and from your verdict there will be no appeal. You know what the circumstances were under which I first came here. You know as

much as any people know of what I have done, or endeavoured to do, in the ten years since I came here. Next week, this day week, your verdict will be passed upon me; upon Mr. Dixon; upon all those gentlemen who are for the first time candidates for your suffrages. Let me beg of you to consider the gravity of the occasion, the greatness of the principles for which we contend, the grandeur of the triumphs that we have already obtained, and the glories of the future to which your country may look forward. And let the man who speaks for Birmingham in the House of Commons be one who shall speak for those great principles which are essential in every country for the happiness of its whole people.

X.

BIRMINGHAM, DECEMBER 21, 1868.

[On December 9 Mr. Disraeli's Cabinet resigned office, and Mr. Gladstone undertook the formation of a new Administration. It was thought that Mr. Bright should take part in the Government. He accepted the office of President of the Board of Trade. On the vacancy which was created by his acceptance of office, and his reappearance before his constituents on December 21, he was returned without opposition.]

I THINK it is about five weeks to-day since I was permitted to stand before you as a candidate for your suffrages at the recent general election. On that occasion you were pleased to elect me as one of your representatives, and all three of us were elected, as you will remember, by an enormous majority over our opponents. At that time I had, I beg to assure you, no expectation and no intention of putting you to the trouble of reconsidering your choice, nor of giving you the opportunity of cutting short my political existence. It was a dream that I had in my youth—I suppose it must have originated in the thraldom of my school-days—that as I advanced in life I should find myself more at liberty and less under the control of circumstances or of the opinion of others. I find that was altogether a dream, and that the longer I live the less I seem to be my own master. I find myself from year to year becoming more of what I may term almost a bond-slave, and my masters becoming from year to year more numerous and

more exacting. The proof of all this is that I am here to-day, and in a new character, one which I had never expected to assume, and one which I have assumed with extreme reluctance.

Since we met five weeks ago great changes, as you know, have occurred. A Government which ought never to have been a Government—a Government which had the boldness to say that it might take its place alongside of the best Governments this country has ever had—has suddenly vanished. It was a strange Government. It was built upon the fraud of the Session of 1866. It lived during the Session of 1867, doing that which in the preceding Session it had declared would be destructive of the constitution and the monarchy; it prolonged a lingering existence during the Session of 1868 by threatening a dying Parliament with an appeal to a dead constituency. And now so entirely has it disappeared that, if the leaders of Constitutional Associations and the frantic clergy who have taken so much interest in the recent general election were to go to Downing-street and look for it, they would not find a trace of its existence left. The subsidence, of course, of one Government necessitates the formation of another, and Mr. Gladstone was called to office by, doubtless, the willing voice of the Queen, and by the approbation of a vast majority of the people in the United Kingdom. Mr. Gladstone, soon after he proceeded to the formation of his Administration, asked me to join him in the Government. I have reason to know that he made that proposition with the cordial and gracious acquiescence of Her Majesty the Queen. As you know, I had very strong grounds for refusing to change my seat and place in the House of Commons. The arguments which were used to induce me to do so were based entirely upon what was considered best for the interests of the great Liberal party and for the public service. I was obliged to admit that on looking at those arguments from such a point of view, they were not easily to be answered.

On the other hand, I could only offer arguments of a private and personal nature, though I had believed them to be unanswerable. But when the private and the personal came to be weighed against the apparent public reasons, the private and the personal yielded to the public, and I surrendered my inclination, and I may say also my judgment, to the opinions and to the judgment of my friends.

Mr. Gladstone told me that he did not wish me to accept any office that was inferior in importance or in emolument to any held by any one of his colleagues, and he proposed that I should accept the position of Secretary of State for India. Now, very many of my friends have urged in past times that I should undertake this office, and not a few have expressed regret that I have not accepted it now. In a sentence, therefore, I think it right to explain why I took the course which led to my declining such an important post. You know that twelve years ago, just before I came here, I suffered from an entire breakdown of my health, which cut me off from public labours for about two years. The Indian department, I believe, is one of very heavy work, and I felt I was not justified in accepting it unless there were great probability of some useful result which could not be accomplished under any other chief of that office. I still retain the opinion that the views which I have expressed in times past—especially in the year 1858, when the India Government Bill was passing through Parliament—are sound, and that the time will come when it will be necessary to apply them to the Government of India. But I believe that public opinion is not sufficiently advanced to allow us to adopt them; and that if I had taken that office I should have found myself unable to carry into effect the principles which I believe to be right with regard to the government of India. At the same time I will confess freely that it did not appear seemly for me—and that I should have been in a wrong place, holding the views which I have held from my youth upwards—if I had connected myself distinctly with the

conduct of the great military departments of the Indian Government. Looking, therefore, at these points, I felt it my duty to decline the proposition; and I said that if I was to accept any seat in this Government, I should prefer to take the office of President of the Board of Trade. In that office I may do a little good, and, perhaps, I may prevent some harm. At least it will not, I hope, so burden me that I may be unable to take a part in the discussion of the great questions which must come very speedily before the House of Commons.

Having said thus much, I must ask you to consider that, although I stand before you in a new character, I have not the smallest intention of getting rid of my old one. I hope the time has arrived in this country—it has only recently arrived—when a man may, perhaps without difficulty, act as an honest Minister of the Crown, and at the same time as an honest and devoted servant and counsellor of the people. But I shall have to ask your patience, and to ask your lenient judgment of my conduct in regard, it may be, to questions which I am not now able to specify, but which must soon come on for consideration and discussion. A Cabinet, as you know, is composed of some fourteen or fifteen members of the two Houses of Parliament. The questions which the Government itself may propose, and the questions which may be submitted to Parliament by others, will require to be discussed and consulted upon by members of the Cabinet; and you are aware that unless there be harmony among the members of any Administration, there must necessarily be failure and disaster. It is therefore possible that in seeking the maintenance of this harmony the members of the Administration may appear at times to take a different line from that which they have taken when unconnected with the Government. If there should be any such occasion—if any one of my constituents should find that I have at any period to come been in a lobby different from that in which at some former period I have been found, let him practise such patience as

he can; for he may understand this, that until I say I have changed my views, those views remain unchanged, and that the different course which I may be compelled to take must be interpreted not as one which affects principle so much as time and opportunity, and that I have had to make a temporary concession to the necessity of maintaining harmony of action among the members of the Government. I must ask you to look always at general results. If I should remain in office one session, two sessions, three sessions, or more, look at the close of each and observe whether the general result of the administration and legislation of the country, under the leadership of the present Prime Minister, is such as to justify you in giving your support to the Government of which he is the head, and then I think I shall have fair ground for asking that you should not withdraw your confidence and support from me.

This Government which has now been formed is the express representation and creation of the great intelligent Liberal party in the three kingdoms. The first question to which the Government must necessarily apply itself is that which was put to the constituencies at the recent elections—the question of the Irish Church—and on that question you have returned a verdict which no man living can mistake. I shall not enter into any argument about the Irish Church. The time for argument has passed; the time for action—and thorough, earnest action—has arrived. But looking at the verdict and the means by which it was obtained, I will say one word with regard to what happened at this recent election, for that mode of ascertaining the popular view on this important question has, to me, its sad and its dark features. In this town, where the majority was so enormous, the difficulty was not so great; but if you survey some of the counties, and a very large number of the boroughs throughout the kingdom—I ought to confine myself very much to England and Ireland, for Scotland may

be to a large extent excepted from this charge—you will find the exercise of the constitutional right of creating a Parliament has been accompanied by much that every lover of freedom and public morals must regret and condemn. We have had tumult in many boroughs. Those twin demons, discord and drink, have run riot in the streets of many of our towns, and among the poorer classes of voters there can be no doubt that bribery to a great extent has prevailed. There has been treating to a still greater extent, and throughout both counties and boroughs there has been in many cases a relentless compulsion which has deprived thousands of electors of the free exercise of those rights to which they were entitled by law. The whole picture, as I surveyed it from day to day in the newspaper reports, was scandalous and frightful. It was utterly humiliating, and every one of us should ask himself whether it is possible to find out a remedy for such a state of things. It seems to me that very much of our electoral system as it has come down from old times, times very different from these, is barbarous and no longer tolerable. I never, for instance, can understand why it should be necessary in all times to have what we term the ceremony of public nominations. It is all very well on an occasion like this, when we are all agreed—when we are not so numerous, that we cannot meet under a roof where there is room for everybody, when good-humour is in everybody's countenance, and when everybody is willing to listen; but in most of our elections the process is of a very different character. The two political parties are more equally divided; they are marshalled by their leaders; men are brought in from surrounding villages and districts; a class which is not familiar with peaceable transactions is often there by invitation; signals are made from one side of the platform and from the other; and what are called the speeches at nominations are not speeches at all, but simply attempts to scream out a few words or sentences in the ear of a neutral but

anxious reporter. The result is this, that the day of nomination is a preliminary skirmish to the general battle of the morrow, and that when men meet face to face, some of them, I am sorry to say, frequently are a little excited by means which are not derived from the passions of a political contest. Under such circumstances, a number of skirmishes occur in the crowd; and before the day is over a very considerable portion of the population of the borough is ready at any moment to do battle with some other portion which is supposed to differ in opinion or in party spirit from it. Then there comes the open voting and the open poll, and from hour to hour the excitement grows, and as the time nears when the race is about to be decided, even in boroughs so well conducted as this, and where the balance is so overwhelmingly on one side, even in our principal streets scenes occur which the day after every one of us looks back upon with regret.

My notion is, that if in one of your large wards, which now contains just as many electors as there were electors of Birmingham ten years ago, you hold the elections for your municipal council without the trouble and turmoil, and conflict and farce of public nomination, it might be easy to arrange that all our elections for Parliament might be conducted on the same principle, with an enormous gain to the true interests of freedom throughout the country.

Again, with regard to the mode of voting to which reference has already been made, I am very glad to tell you that when I went up to London last week I found, I was going to say, hardly anybody, professing to be a Liberal on the Liberal side of the House of Commons who was not in favour of the Ballot. They who had previously been in its favour have been strongly confirmed in their views by recent transactions, and some important persons, who heretofore have withheld their countenance from it, freely admit that what they have seen of late has entirely changed their opinion,

and that they believe that with our present wide suffrage—I do not know why it should be more just in one case than in the other—the adoption of the Ballot is not only proper, but inevitable.

There is another matter, as we are Americanising our institutions, about which I wish to say a word. That very foolish phrase, you will remember, was adopted by the friends and partisans of the late Government, who themselves last year took the greatest step which has been made in such a direction during our lifetime. But, as I was going to observe, there is a rule in the elections in some American States which is found to be very useful—that on the day of the polling in the cities the public-houses are closed. My own opinion is, that such a rule would tend greatly to the tranquillity of our towns, and would, probably, tend to promote that clearness of intellect which is so very necessary for rightly exercising the privilege of the franchise. But matters have at last come to this point, that it is absolutely necessary that public attention should be called to the whole subject of our mode of election, and that Parliament will not fulfil its duty to itself or to the country unless it takes the matter up with a thorough determination to apply to the evils to which I have alluded the best and speediest remedies of which they are capable. Surely, if Parliament is the guardian of freedom, of justice, and of public morals, it is desirable that it should not have its origin in transactions such as were witnessed in the recent general election.

And now, what other question is there that, in your opinion, as a great national question, requires early attention? (Several voices—'Ratepaying.') That question is not so much a national as a local question. I was going to refer to another point on which I spoke at the meeting previous to the late election—the question of public and national education. I believe that the more political power is removed from the monarch, or the nobles, or a select class in a country, and

the more it is distributed among the people, although such a reform is by itself a great means of education, that it calls for more attention to the proper, complete, and universal extension of education among the community. In all our parishes throughout the kingdom there are organisations for the relief of pauperism and for the punishment of crime. I want to ask why, if these things are to be done by the public will and by the fiat of Parliament, we cannot have at least as complete and as widely-sustained an organisation, by which all the children of our people shall be educated in knowledge and self-respect? This is a question which Parliament will, no doubt, consider, and which the Government—any Government, whether this or any other—cannot leave altogether out of the catalogue of things which must be considered and must be done.

There is one other—and it is the only other—great public question on which I shall say anything now. This is our large, and, as I think, our scandalous expenditure. Of course, the diminution of expenditure is not a simple matter like the passing of a particular Bill, or the repeal of some odious Act of Parliament; it is not a thing that can be done in one Session, and by one stroke of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's pen. The reduction of our expenditure, to be considerable and to be effectual, must be extended over successive Sessions of Parliament. It will be necessary that the Administration should entitle itself to the support of the country, that it should from Session to Session exercise a rigid economy, that it should sensibly lessen what I call our gross and scandalous expenditure, and lessen in a corresponding degree the oppressive and intolerable taxation which now presses upon the English people. Since that unfortunate event, the war with Russia in 1854, the cost of the military organisation in this country has increased, as you know, enormously. But at the same time, the people have come to the opinion that our ancient policy of interfering with the

disputes and confusion on the Continent ought to be abandoned. Even the late Prime Minister in his speeches, when he wished to tell the people how good a Government his was, laid special stress upon the foreign policy of Lord Stanley, and the foreign policy of Lord Stanley was not to meddle and muddle, and not to give advice where it was not asked for, and not to take part in the confusion of the Continent, but to have regard solely to the real dignity and the true interests of this nation. Well, that is our foreign policy to-day. It is that which I have always preached from your platforms. It is that which was defended elaborately by me in a speech in your own Town-hall, on the very first occasion when I appeared before you as your representative, and at a banquet to which I was invited. What can be more foolish, what more worthy, not of sensible men, but of lunatics, than that when we are abandoning a policy of constant and incessant, of costly and sanguinary interference, we should still find it necessary to add millions and millions to our military expenditure, as if, instead of becoming wiser in our foreign policy, we were every year becoming more foolish than our fathers have been? Rely upon it, that so long as Parliament exacts from the industry of this people 70,000,000*l.* a year, there is no power on earth that can raise your poor and suffering population from its present position. The outlay of 1,000,000*l.*, 10,000,000*l.*, 20,000,000*l.* a-year makes a difference which no man can calculate; it withers up the chances of comfort and of hope in hundreds and thousands of the homes of the poorest of your people.

The other day, in Edinburgh, and afterwards here, I spoke of a free breakfast-table. Now, the more I consider the matter the more I feel convinced that the attainment of that object is practicable, and that its attainment would be felt to be an enormous relief to the great multitudes of your population, because out of the 10,000,000*l.* of taxation that might

be remitted, three fourths at least would find its way into the homes of the people; and at the same time the remission would stimulate our foreign trade to a very great extent by stimulating the consumption of those articles which we receive from abroad. It would give extended employment everywhere, by the diminution of the prices of the articles from which the taxation was remitted, and it would give a greater power to consume to the whole body of the people. Let me tell you this—I say it as a member of the Administration which is just formed, and I tell you nothing here that is a secret—that no Government is deserving of the confidence and support of the people of this country which cannot carry on the administration of the country in a manner which is consistent with the dignity and the security of the nation for a smaller sum than 70,000,000*l.* a year.

I have explained to you under what circumstances I have become a member of the present Administration. Although I did so with great reluctance, still, having taken the step which was urged upon me, I hope I shall give such labour and service to office as may be in my power, and that I may be a strength, and not a weakness, to my colleagues. But even more I hope that I may be a strength, and not a weakness, to those great public questions in which you and I in past years have taken so deep an interest. Let me however advise you that Parliaments do not march rapidly unless public opinion backs them; that the power of a Government to do what is good for the nation is not absolute, but that it requires to be backed up by the public will; for, as I have told you before, every Ministry that has existed or will exist in this country finds itself immediately face to face with powerful interests, which are always asking for more. The military services, the civil services—all those classes whose income is derived from the Exchequer—necessarily look for promotion and the concession of larger means. If any one of the present audience were placed in the same circumstances—

if I were one of those persons—and in a sense I am temporarily one of them, I could easily, I think, feel the necessity, certainly the inclination, of asking for some advance in position or salary. And you will find that those services, now so powerful and so numerous, have their own newspapers, under various names, which are supported by them, and which advocate their interests, and what they deem to be their rights. These rights however—if I do not take a distorted view of them—are not consistent with those of the taxpayers in the kingdom at large. The Government, therefore, requires all the patience, and sympathy, and support which the great body of the people can give them in their endeavours to reduce expenditure and to lessen and equalise taxation.

I was told last night, or the night before, that I was expected to say a great many things about what was going to be done. If it were proper to say them, I should be unable to say them, because, as you know, the Administration has only just been formed, and its members have only once met. There has been as yet no time to discuss and determine any of those questions which must necessarily claim the attention of the Government and of Parliament. My own view of the future is this, that it is the duty of the Ministry in the present Session of Parliament to settle finally, if possible, the great question which was referred to the people at the late general election, and not to encumber it with work which ought not to be placed in competition with it. I propose to myself to ask my constituents, to ask the public, and to ask the whole Liberal party at the end of each Session, to form their opinions of the course the Government shall have taken, of the efforts it has made to do wisely and well, by the general result of the legislation during the session. The future will tell its own tale; and this Government, like all preceding Governments, must be judged not by what it says, or by what it believes, but by what it attempts to do, and by what it succeeds in accomplishing.

For myself, I have accepted what I know to be a position of difficulty, if not, indeed, of peril. I feel that I have been pushed into it by circumstances which I could not withstand, and by the opinion, expressed in various ways, of a very large portion of the Liberal party with whom I have been accustomed to act. I think, therefore, that I have the right to claim something from the sympathy and something from the leniency of my friends. I have not aspired at any time of my life to the rank of a Privy Councillor nor to the dignity of a Cabinet office. I should have preferred much to have remained in that common rank of simple citizenship in which heretofore I have lived. There is a passage of the Old Testament, which has often struck me as being one of great beauty. Many of you will recollect that the prophet, in journeying to and fro, was very hospitably entertained by what is termed in the Bible a Shunammite woman. In return for her hospitality he wished to make her some amends, and he called her to him and asked her what there was that he should do for her. 'Shall I speak for thee to the king,' he said, 'or to the captain of the host?' Now it has always appeared to me that the Shunammite woman returned a natural answer. She replied, in declining the prophet's offer, 'I dwell among mine own people.' When the question was put to me whether I would step into the position in which I now find myself, the answer from my heart was the same—I wish to dwell among mine own people. Happily, the time may have come—I trust it has come—when in this country an honest man may enter the service of the Crown, and at the same time not feel it in any degree necessary to dissociate himself from his own people. Some partial friends of mine have said that I have earned all this by my long services in the popular cause. They know not what they say. They would add labour to labour, and would compensate a life of service by a redoubled responsibility. I am sensible of the duty which is imposed upon me as a Minister of the Crown. It is my

duty faithfully to perform that which belongs to such a position; but I have not less faithfully to act as becomes an honest representative of the people. I shall make the attempt. There are many who believe the attempt must fail. I hope that it will not fail. I will do all that I can to make it succeed. And if I should find that the two offices of which I am speaking are inconsistent or discordant, I hope at least that I shall be able to discover which of them it is right for me to surrender.

I have done. I have spoken longer than I intended. The position is one which is new to me and new to you, too, and it is not without its difficulties and dangers. I thank you heartily for the cordial reception which you have given me to-day. You have, by the unanimity of your voice, given your sanction to the step which I have been induced to take. I accept my new position with this feeling, that the more cordial has been that sanction, the more generous is your approval of my action, the more am I called upon, by all the high motives which can actuate a public man, to do my honest duty, not only to those with whom I am associated in office, but to you, my constituents, who, at this moment, truly represent the great Liberal party throughout the kingdom.

XI.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 11, 1870.

[On this day the three members for Birmingham met their constituents. Since his re-election on the acceptance of office in Mr. Gladstone's Government, as President of the Board of Trade, Mr. Bright had not addressed the Birmingham electors. The occasion therefore was one of considerable public interest, and it was supposed that Mr. Bright's speech would indicate in some particulars what would be the policy of the Government.]

THE resolution which you have just passed is one which approves the general conduct of the Government during the last Session of Parliament. As a member of that Government I tender you on my own account, and I think I may on behalf of all those with whom I am permitted to act, our hearty thanks for that resolution to which you have so unanimously agreed. I can only hope, and I am enabled not only to hope but to believe, that if we shall be permitted to come here at the end of another Session we shall also receive on that occasion a like testimony of your approval.

You who are accustomed to come here to these our annual assemblies will remember that it has never been my custom to give you elaborate expositions of the measures which were passed in the preceding Session of Parliament. We have rather taken the course indicated by Mr. Radford. We have looked very little behind, and we have kept our eyes steadily before us. So now, with only two exceptions, I will say nothing about the Session of Parliament that is past. The

two questions to which I will advert for a moment have already been mentioned since the commencement of this meeting. Mr. Radford has mentioned them both, one being of great local and the other of great imperial importance. You will recollect that last year my honourable friends and myself undertook before the constituency, as far as we had the power, to amend the Reform Act of 1867, and to relieve the great body of the ratepayers of Birmingham from a grievance which had arisen by the abolition of the system of compounding for rates. We have, I believe, faithfully acted upon that promise, and the Bill which has been carried, although it cannot undo the fact and cannot entirely remove some irritation which still prevails, was yet intended to correct the evil complained of. That grievance henceforth can no longer exist. The other question of imperial importance is that of the Irish Church. The constituencies of the country spoke with a voice which everybody could hear, and, which is not always the case, with a voice which everybody could understand. In consequence a measure was introduced into Parliament which I believe has been admitted to be by the most able of its opponents one of the most complete Bills which ever was presented to the House of Commons. After many nights' debate in both Houses of Parliament the measure became law and the work was done, but you will recollect that, in the month of July, there was at one time some difficulty in what is called 'another place;'—it is not the place to which my hon. colleagues and I go when we repair to London, but it is a place of great antiquity, of great dignity, and of great influence in this country. On a given night—the date is not material—the atmosphere of the place became charged with—what shall I say?—with dangerous matter. There was more passion than is generally seen in that serene assembly, and the passion went so far as to drive those who occupied the benches of the place to the edge of a very ugly precipice. Fortunately, there was time for the passion to

cool, and for the wisest to reflect; and the first night after, or the night but one after that, instead of this violent passion and violent opposition to the measure of the Government, the Bill, after mutual compliments and mutual congratulations, was passed by the House of Lords. The Peers of the United Kingdom on that night taught some people a lesson by showing what they themselves had learnt. But what was the lesson? That no institution, however ancient, however dignified, however grand in its historical character, can be safe in this country if it permanently sets itself against the convictions and the voice of a united people. A great deal of wisdom was shown by the House of Peers. You must consider that they are not placed as we are in regard to questions of this nature. You must consider all which they have been taught, and all which they have honestly believed, and all which they have feared; for under those circumstances the friends of the House of Lords at least have something to congratulate them upon. But there are people who say this great Bill was a failure, and that it has really done nothing. The fact is that it has done exactly what it was intended to do. It has put all the Churches in Ireland on the same footing before the law. There is no longer a Catholic grievance in Ireland. There may be Irish grievances, but there is no Catholic grievance. The Catholics stand now before the law on this subject—and indeed, so far as I know, with scarcely any exception, on every other subject exactly where the Protestants stand. We therefore have swept away, at once and for ever, everything that can fairly be alleged to be a Catholic grievance.

But there may be, there seems to be, a general opinion that there is another Irish grievance; not a religious grievance, but one which affects the North as well as the South. There rises a cry from the whole of Ireland that the Government and the Parliament should do something to place the social condition of Ireland in a more satisfactory state than has

hitherto been seen. The land question is a very awkward one. But it is not an impossible problem. I have often travelled along a road and seen a hill a mile off that looked very steep, and I wished I was on the other side of it, but on coming to the foot of the hill the slope has been found to be very gradual, and I have got over it without the difficulty which I had anticipated. The Irish land question is not indeed of so easy a kind. I have thought it a difficult question for twenty years. During all that time I have had it before me, and have considered it, and I am, I will say, if you like, modest enough to confess that every time that I get nearer the hill, and endeavour to discover how it is to be crossed, it appears to me steeper and more difficult than it ever did before. If they may be stated in a few sentences, what are the circumstances of Ireland? The land of that island is in the hands, as you know, of very few proprietors. I suppose half the actual population of Ireland are cultivators of the soil, and they are not only cultivators of the soil, but, unfortunately, they are what are called tenants at will. The owners for generations past, by their own admission, with rare exceptions, which need not be mentioned, have done nothing for the cultivation of the soil. They have let the land at an auction rent, and twice a-year they have received the rent. This has been the chief part of the duty which the landowners of Ireland have performed to their land. On the other hand, the tenants have done very little compared with what might have been done; but quite as much as could be expected from people who had no security for anything they might do. Thus the industry, the fortunes, the home, the very life of the cultivating population have been at the mercy of the owner of the land, or of the agent who had the management of his property.

But there is something else. The owners are not of the same nation as the occupiers. I think that Mr. Huxley, who is a great authority, and I have no wish to dispute what he

says, denies altogether that there is any difference of race between the people of Ireland and the people of England. I hope that is true. I have always been of opinion that, if there were a difference of race between them, the difference of their condition arises a thousand times more from a difference of treatment, a difference in their possession of political and legal rights, than from difference of race. But the occupiers and owners generally differ very much in religion, and although there is no reason why a Protestant landowner and a Catholic tenant or a Protestant tenant and a Catholic landowner might not be the best of friends, yet when there has been an incessant war in Ireland for two hundred years between Protestantism and Catholicism, you may be quite sure that something has been done to poison the relations between the owner and occupier of the soil. Then this proprietary right in Ireland had its origin mainly in confiscation; and as it was created, so it was only justified by conquest. And as if the original evil was not sufficient, there was added to it a hundred years of the most odious cruelty and persecution under the operation of the penal laws. The original grievance has been made ten times more bitter than it would otherwise have been by the folly of the proprietary class, working as they did through a corrupt Parliament in Ireland, and also through the governing power in Great Britain.

In Ireland, as I dare say most of you know, agriculture is not only the great industry, but, with some exceptions in the North of Ireland, it is almost the only industry of the country. There has been consequently in the struggle for life and the means of living, such an excessive competition for the occupation of land as has placed the occupier at the mercy of the proprietor of the soil. Thus Ireland has passed through a long experience of wrong, of hatred, and of suspicion, even in some parts of civil war and that of the bitterest character, till at last Parliament is called on, not merely to give right and justice to the tenants, but to

save the interests and protect the property of the proprietors. I do not know myself whether, if I were an Irishman, I should be more anxious for legislation as a tenant than I should for legislation as a landlord. But I am sure that it is absolutely necessary for the good of the United Kingdom that we should, if possible, put an end to the reign of discord in Ireland, and take away from us the disgrace of maintaining order by an armed force of police and military, seldom I believe falling lower than 30,000 men. I consider this Irish land question one of the greatest and most difficult that ever has been considered by an Administration or submitted to a Parliament. My views upon it have been explained in this hall in past times, and it will not be necessary, nor would it be right for me to go into details about the matter, when probably before the end of next month whatever propositions the Government will submit to the House of Commons will be fully explained to all the people of the three kingdoms. But if I might say a word to people who are apt to criticise very much everything which a Government does, I do not ask them to approve beforehand, but I ask them merely to give to the propositions, whatsoever they may be, that conscientious consideration which, I believe, these propositions have received and will receive from the members of the Government. This is not a question for party. I have no objection to party contests when the time is fitting for them, but in the present condition of Ireland a party fight would be an unpatriotic fight. It is not a question for class and party conflict—it is one for conscientious patriotism, a question which every man should consider, because the prosperity, the peace, and the unity of the empire depend upon its wise solution.

I have often spoken here and elsewhere upon the state of Ireland. I have blamed the leaders of parties in the House of Commons for what they have done or left undone for Ireland. Three or four years ago, when the Habeas

Corpus Act was suspended, I blamed Mr. Gladstone, then leader in the House of Commons of the Ministry of Lord Russell—I blamed Mr. Disraeli, who was leading the Opposition—because they did not in some way or other bring before the House propositions which should settle what is understood to be the Irish question. But I knew that it could not be dealt with fairly by an unreformed Parliament. I laboured, as you know, much for Reform, for I had great faith in a wider franchise and a free representation. The Irish difficulty was to me of so complicated and gigantic a character that I felt sure that it could never be dealt with by the Parliament of the past. It seemed to demand the will, the sense of justice, and the power which dwell only in a nation. And now, when to a large extent the nation is called into council, when every householder in every borough has a vote for a representative in Parliament, I feel—it may be that I am over-sanguine—that great results are sure to follow from the legislature. The Imperial Parliament can do just as much, by way of legislation for Ireland, with its hundred Irish members, as an independent Irish monarchy or an Irish republic could do, or as could be done for Ireland if Ireland were one of the States in the great Confederation of the West. I am not saying that it has done so or that it will do so, but I say that the Imperial Parliament, with a hundred honest representatives for Ireland on its benches, can do all that is wanted. What has been done already? In conjunction with her representatives we have already given to Ireland free churches and free schools, and I hope before long that we shall give them free land and a free vote. Ireland, as you well know, is not the most wealthy island in the world, but we can buy from her all she wishes to sell at a higher price than any other nation can give, and we can sell to her all she wishes to buy at a lower price than any other nation. We may fail, but I believe that we shall not fail. Good and honest efforts generally succeed. We propose, then,

a new conquest of Ireland without confiscation and without blood—with only the holy weapon of a frank and a generous justice, which is everywhere potent to bring together nations which have been alienated by oppression or by neglect. From such a new policy we hope for great changes in Ireland. We do not expect that Ireland is to be made a paradise, but that it will be greatly altered for the better. It may seem like the language of exaggeration when I quote the lines of Pope in one of the most exquisite poems in our language:—

> 'Then crime shall cease, and ancient fraud shall fail,
> Returning Justice lift aloft her scale;
> Peace o'er the realm her olive wand extend,
> And white-robed Innocence from heaven descend.'

This may appear like the language of exaggeration, but if we are able to suppress conspiracy, if we can banish agrarian crime, if we can unbar the prison doors, if we can reduce all excess of military force, if we can make Ireland as tranquil as England and Scotland now are—then, at least, I think we may have done something to justify the wisdom and the statesmanship of our time.

But there are still some other topics, on two of which I will touch as briefly as I can. One is that upon which Birmingham has very recently taken its right position and done itself so much honour—I mean public education. I am sure there must be many here who will remember one of the arguments or predictions that I made use of years ago in advocating a wide extension of the franchise. I have said over and over again, hundreds of times in private and many times in public, that I thought three years would not elapse between the election of a household suffrage Parliament and a system of national education. My particular views upon this subject were stated at length in a meeting which I addressed just before the general election. At present the most gratifying prospect is that there seems to be a general

tendency towards some arrangement which no party will consider unsatisfactory. We are agreed upon this—whether speakers or writers belong to one section or the other—that there must be some means of instruction offered to all the children of the people. Thus far we are unanimous. We are not unanimous upon the manner, but the discussion which is going on is producing that kind of unanimity out of which it is possible to propose and carry this reform. Whether the school shall be free or whether there shall be any compulsion, and if so, whether it shall be of this kind or of that, are particulars which are being sifted by the discussions which are being carried on,—and there is nobody learns more from public discussion than a member of Her Majesty's Government. We have seen all Governments learn a great many things, and I hope that I, who have been so long a teacher, may have the privilege of learning from my countrymen.

One thing gratifies me exceedingly. I think that the religious difficulty is diminishing in magnitude. Nobody proposes that we shall insist upon teaching everybody the articles or dogmas or creeds or the peculiarities of any particular sect or Church. When I consider that as regards the boys and girls of the middle class who go to day schools no thought is ever taken whether they are to be taught religion in their schools, I confess I cannot understand the extraordinary anxiety which is felt that the working people alone should have their children taught religion in a day school. It has always appeared to me that one day in seven is felt to be sufficient for such a family duty, and that the minister and the religious associations of every place of worship are a sufficient organisation for teaching religion in the sense which is meant by those who say that education is of no value unless it be taught alongside of distinct religious instruction. Every child in every school may be taught these parts of religion—the love of truth, the love of virtue, the love of God, and the fear of offending Him; and I think that every right-

minded teacher in every school in England will undertake, so far as is in his power, to teach so much to all the children under his care. The fact is, the denominational system was one of those arrangements which are made because something must necessarily be done, and no other course seemed possible. But it is obvious that under the denominational system nearly all the Government money necessarily goes to the Established Church, because the Nonconformist Churches are are not one Church, but several Churches, and they are not united, and probably never can unite to form a great body for educational purposes. Therefore, if you give 1,000,000*l.* from the State for the purpose of education, the great bulk of it necessarily goes to that one-half of the population which is powerful and united, while the other half, which though powerful is not united, will get almost nothing. But there is another difficulty which those gentlemen who are fond of the denominational system appear to me to overlook. One-third of the people do not belong to any denomination whatever.

I am persuaded that as this topic is more fully discussed, there will come up a demand for national education from all the people. There is nobody more interested in the education of his children than the working man. How much of the grief of the later years of such men has arisen from the ignorance and misconduct of their children? Then as this cry comes up from the great body of the people to the more educated and wealthy classes and to Parliament, the religious question will gradually become smaller and smaller, and we shall be able to offer to all the children of the country a sound elementary education, which will enable them to entertain a feeling of self-respect, and will open up to them a much better prospect in life than they can possibly have without such an education. We who have pressed this matter for many years, my hon. friend (Mr. Dixon) for example, who has taken so prominent a part in it, may not see the results of the change which is impending. The revolution which

will arise in the condition of the people from such an improvement is one of certain, although it may be of slow growth. But even now I see, as it were with the eye of faith, the great change which will be made in this country, the prodigious advantage which will be given to the millions who heretofore have been living in ignorance, and are unable as yet to struggle upwards to the light.

There is only one other question to which I will call your attention for a few moments. It is one which has been, although it is very important, very feebly discussed by those who have introduced it to the public. I refer to the commercial treaty with France. All persons who call in question the advantage of the treaty with France call in question, although they may not suspect it, the freedom of trade. The policy of free trade was discussed from the year 1838 to the year 1850—almost incessantly for twelve years. Many persons now—many in this room—who were too young to understand these discussions or take any part in them, do not know how entirely the question was settled at the end of that long debate by the judgment of the people. But there is a sort of soil which grows only weeds; and ignorance and selfishness, wherever they exist, are the soil which is particularly favourable to the growth of the protection weed. But then these gentlemen say that they are not raising the question of protection, they are merely raising that of reciprocity. Well, protection has an ill-name, there is a bad flavour about it altogether. It was found out to mean that somebody was robbing somebody else, and therefore people dropped the name 'protection,' and adopted the name 'reciprocity.' Our Conservative friends, as you all know, have changed their name several times, and one always suspects a man who lives in Birmingham under one name and has another when he goes to Manchester, and a third when you find him in Leeds. I should like to tell this meeting one or two things. France is a great country, as you know, lying so near that you can

see it from some points of the shores of England. It contains a very industrious and a very ingenious people. Our trade with France during the last ten years, from the negotiation of the treaty in 1860, has more than doubled. It has increased more in these ten years than it did in the hundred years before. Now what does this mean? It means that a good many people in England have sold a great many things to the people of France, and that the people of France have bought a great many things from the people of England. Now, if you find a man in England that has sold something to France and bought something that he wanted from France, he will tell you, so far as he is concerned, that the treaty has been a very good thing indeed. If that be so, and if this buying and selling extends to many millions, no one can say, 'I have not the right to buy, and you have not the right to sell.' But if any person should say, 'You shall buy from me, and not from that Frenchman,' does he not, if he insists that you shall not buy, also insist that you shall not sell? What is it that you in Birmingham live upon? You do not live upon metals; you work on metals, on all kinds of metals, with an industry and skill hardly equalled on the face of the globe; but what do you do when you have done your work on metals? You sell the produce of your labour and buy something which you can wear or eat. Why should you not sell what you make to the Frenchman? He, perhaps, wants something which nobody else wants; he will perhaps give you more than any one else will to get it. Why should any one stand between the skilled British artisan and other persons and say, 'You may work but shall not deal with a customer a few miles away'? The reciprocity man says, 'You may deal with the Frenchman, only he must deal with you.' Unfortunately we have only the making of our own tariffs. We cannot change others except by negotiations like that of 1860. Having got France to make a large step in the progress of Free Trade, the people

turn round and abuse the Frenchman because he has not done as much as we have done, and say we shall not deal with him unless he will adopt Free Trade principles to the full extent to which we have carried them out in this country. What would they do to the United States when they levy a duty on our goods which is at least three times as heavy as that which France levies upon us? The firm with which I am connected sends goods to America which pay a duty of seventy-five per cent. Every 100*l.* worth of such goods leaving Liverpool pays on arriving at New York seventy-five pounds before it can go into the city to be sold. The American people will put all that right by and by. They are going through the process of instruction such as we went through thirty years ago. But is it proposed to put a tax upon American cotton and American corn because the Americans put a heavy tax upon our goods? Why, the thing is monstrous. It is only to make one evil double, to make a trade which you carry on under certain difficulties a trade which shall be absolutely impossible. I will tell you an anecdote about Birmingham. There is a firm of manufacturers in this town who make various kinds of machinery. I happen to know that before the treaty they sold almost nothing to France. Since the treaty, in the ten years they have sold no less than 70,000*l.* worth of machinery, the particulars of which I do not know, though I know the general facts. They have seventy men at least engaged every week, and have had for years past, producing articles which are exported entirely to France. If you have the treaty abolished, what becomes of the trade? what becomes of the seventy men? what becomes of the firm? There are people who come down from Warwickshire into Lancashire who say that these seventy men in Birmingham—and there may be, for anything I know, 700 or 7,000, looking at all the firms in Birmingham—should have their trade stopped; that their skill shall be of no value; that they shall turn their industry to some other calling, which is, perhaps,

already abundantly supplied with labour, and that the manufacturing and commercial capital shall be directed into a different channel, where there is perhaps plenty already employed. No doubt the French duties are higher than ours, but look what happened before the French treaty took effect. For twenty years before that we were gradually reducing our duties. We did not ask anybody to negotiate; we thought they would follow our example. Unfortunately for them, they were not wise enough to do so. But what has happened since 1860—since that treaty was negotiated? I believe there is not a country in Europe that has not reformed its tariff in some manner or other and made some approaches—in some cases small, in others greater—towards Free Trade, either in its tariff or its navigation laws. The result therefore of the treaty has been of great importance all over Europe, and of the greatest importance to both England and France. If ever you meet a gentleman who talks to you about reciprocity, ask him what he wants to put duties upon, because that is the question. Does he want to tax your bread, or your cotton, or your wool? What is it he wants to tax? He cannot give anybody what he calls reciprocity without taxing somebody else; and when there are two persons to be thought of, I think at least we should have as much regard to the person who is going to be taxed as the person who is going to profit by the taxation.

But you know perfectly well that when my lamented friend Mr. Cobden negotiated that treaty he had more than one object in view. He not only wanted to create a greater demand for the industry of his countrymen and to extend our manufactures and our commerce, but he wanted also to make provision for future peace between the great nations of France and England. Is there a man in this great assembly, or in England, who will deny this—that from 1860 to 1870, the ten years during which this treaty has been in force, there has grown up between France and England a sentiment

of friendship, a disposition to peace, and an absence of suspicion and of angry feeling, such as we have never seen before? The negotiator of that treaty was not only the friend of his countrymen, but the friend of all mankind. He wanted every man to be honestly employed, to be honestly paid, and to live in comfort in his own country. He wanted, further, in order to carry out one of the great objects of his life, to show that which I believe to be absolutely true, that every step you make in the freedom of trade is a step in favour of a universal bond of peace.

In conclusion, may I give one word of warning to the working men of Birmingham and to working men everywhere? You will admit, although there are questions, I have no doubt, on which you and I may differ very much, that I have never been afraid to give you your full share of political power, and that I have spared no exertion for many years to bring about that great change in your political condition under which happily you are now living. I say, beware of men who attempt to deceive you. If you will look back, such of you as can to your memories, others who cannot to books and conversation, over the events of the last forty years, you will find that there have always been some men in the country who ought to have known better, and who ought to have done better, but who have been ready to trail a red herring across the path of the working men of England. There are certain things which Parliament and a Government can do for a people, and there are other things which no Government that ever existed, or will exist, can do. You have now got votes. Votes are power. I hope, judging from the proceedings of the Committee of last Session, and judging from the temper of Parliament, that before there is a general election, not only you, but every voter in every part of the United Kingdom, will have the shelter of the Ballot. You will have it; whether it be this Session or next Session it is not in my power to tell.

Mr. Radford said, if the Government had any leisure on their hands they could do two or three other things. But bear in mind that it is not easy to drive six omnibuses abreast through Temple Bar. And, therefore, I cannot tell whether during this Session there will be passed, or even offered to Parliament, a measure of education such as you or I, or any of us, would hope for. But that it will come soon is certain and inevitable. That is worth your keeping your eyes upon. Then there is the question of diminished national expenditure. You know that last year there was a considerable reduction of expenditure. We believe and hope that there may be a reduction this year, and if you only keep your attention up, and tell your members, and Parliament, and the Government what you think upon it, it is quite within the bounds of probability that you may have a gradual reduction for several years. Government cannot strike off millions in a year, because you know that however wasteful may have been the past proceedings of past Governments, it would create great inconvenience and great suffering in many quarters if any sudden change of such a kind took place. But you may rely, I believe, on the honesty of the Government in this matter. Always bear in mind that every Government, however honest and however well-disposed, is most capable of doing what is right when it has the full support of public opinion.

A friend near me speaks of the free breakfast table. That is Mr. Baldwin's hobby. I cannot compliment him upon it because it is mine also. The Malt Tax does not come into the breakfast generally, but it shows that my friend is getting a little nearer to me than he was some time ago. The free breakfast table is by no means an impossible thing. I have never been in the habit of recommending or proposing things that are impossible. If we could get rid of the taxes upon the articles which come to our breakfast tables, we should have a free country as far as our ports and customs' duties go, with the exception of things which many people think not necessary,

but injurious—such as beer, spirits, wines, tobacco. What a magnificent thing it would be for every Englishman in whatever he traded all the world over, to say to all the world, 'Send everything which all mankind agree to be useful and beneficial to the human race. Send them to any port in England, and they will be received there without payment of a farthing of duty.' I am speaking now, I may remind you, as your representative. I am not speaking in any other capacity. I am making no promises; I am telling you what I believe to be possible, and what the people of England will get if they will examine it, comprehend it, make up their minds in its favour, and let Parliament and the Government know what it is they are thinking about.

There is another question which working men should bear in mind, and to which Mr. Radford also alluded—the question of free land in this country. It is coming on and is inevitable. Within ten years—probably within five—it will be the great question for discussion at all political meetings. I believe that an alteration of the land laws of England, such as might be made without lessening by sixpence the value of any man's property, would do much to arrest that tide of pauperism which is constantly flowing from the agricultural counties into our great centres of industry. But when I have mentioned these things I am obliged to confess that they are not all—that something more is wanted, although the law will not effect it, and although its foundation lies beyond the bounds of law. It is that which every man should consider—I have considered it often and often with great seriousness and with much anxiety during the thirty years that I have been in the habit of discussing public questions. No Government, no Administration, no laws, no amount of industry or commerce, no extent of freedom can give prosperity and solid comfort to the homes of the people unless there be in those homes economy, temperance, and the practice of virtue. That which I am preaching is needful for all, but it is specially

needful—most needful in some respects—for those whose possessions are the least abundant and the least secure. If we could subtract from the ignorance, the poverty, the suffering, the sickness, and the crime which are now witnessed among us, the ignorance, the poverty, the suffering, the sickness, and the crime which are caused by one single but most prevalent bad habit or vice—the drinking needlessly of that which destroys body and mind, and home and family—do we not all feel that this country would be so changed, and so changed for the better, that it would be almost impossible for us to know it again? Let me then, in conclusion, say what is upon my heart to say, what I know to be true, what I have felt every hour of my life when I have been discussing anything which affects the condition of the working classes. It is by the union of a wise Government with a virtuous people, and not otherwise, that we may hope to make some steps towards that blessed time when there shall be no longer complaining in our streets, when our garners shall be full, affording all manner of store.

XII.

ROCHDALE, JULY 11, 1872.

[Some of Mr. Bright's friends residing in the Staffordshire Potteries resolved to make him a present which should represent choice specimens of the best art in the district. The works were selected from the manufactories of Messrs. Minton, Messrs. Wedgwood, and Messrs. Copeland. The presentation was made at Rochdale, and in Mr. Bright's house, and was accompanied by the following address:—

'We are delegated by your friends resident in the Staffordshire Potteries, to ask your acceptance of these examples of the artistic productions of that district, and of the cabinet in which they are contained.

'No such gift can adequately express the esteem and affection by which the givers are actuated. We nevertheless hope that to you in your present comparative retirement, as well as to your children, these objects may not unworthily indicate the regard and admiration which your public and private virtues have inspired.

'Having had the happiness of looking to you with unqualified confidence as our gifted and fearless leader, our hearts beat high in unison with yours, and in devout pride, as we review the peaceful but decisive victories which have crowned the great struggles to which you have devoted your life.

'Sympathising with you in the abhorrence of every form of human bondage, we rejoiced to find you acting up to the glorious traditions of the anti-slavery movement, and aiding with your powerful advocacy the cause which, in a kindred community, triumphed in the emancipation of a long-oppressed race.

'With equal pleasure we trace in broadest lines your influence in the removal of those fetters which a perverse ingenuity had placed on our commercial intercourse with other nations, the overthrow of the numerous fallacies which have yielded to the logic of Free Trade, the abolition of the Corn Laws and the imposts known as "the taxes on knowledge," and the repeal of those humiliating disabilities so long and so rigorously maintained as penalties on the free exercise of religious convictions.

'And while we remember your share in the attainment of these results,

we congratulate you on the legislative adoption of the theories you have propounded, in the government of our Indian possessions, in the accomplishment of household suffrage, and in the great remedial measures which have been applied to Ireland.

'To have witnessed such achievements even as a passive spectator is no small privilege. To have been honoured with a foremost position in initiating, impelling, and guiding each movement has been your pre-eminent distinction.

'With such a retrospect we thank God and take courage; nor can we imagine any higher gratification which you can desire than to see the fruition of your patriotic policy in the unexampled prosperity of your country, and to find these changes accepted (and even—with amusing audacity—some share in the merit of effecting them claimed) by those whose hostility had to be combated at every stage until the final one was reached.

'Remembering how little you have allowed yourself to be influenced by any consideration other than the conviction of right and duty, we nevertheless trust you will allow us to tender these grateful acknowledgments of the services which you have rendered to us and to our fellow-countrymen, and to assure you of our earnest desire that you may speedily be restored to perfect health, to your place in the National Councils, and to the exercise of those powers which have contributed so largely to the stability of society and the prosperity of the nation.'

Mr. Bright was at the time slowly recovering from the serious illness which compelled him to resign the office of President of the Board of Trade in Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet.]

THERE are times probably in the experience of men who are most accustomed to public speaking when they find it difficult to express what they feel. I have known such times before to-day. To-day is one of those times. I thank you for your kindness, for the honour you have done me, and for this beautiful and costly gift—too good for the moderate size and modest appointments of my house, but such as I must ever value in a very high degree. This gift has a special significance to me, both as to the persons from whom it comes and the time when it is made. I think it is nearly thirty years since I spent a day in your district. I visited it last in order to attend a free-trade meeting with my dear and lamented friend Mr. Cobden. Since then, excepting when passing through the district, generally at railway speed, I have seen nothing of it. Therefore, those who make me this gift are persons of whom I have had, until recently, no knowledge

whatever, and I presume they know nothing of me excepting in my public character. I may assume, therefore, as I assume from your kind address, that my public course and labours have met generally, not probably in all cases, but generally, with the consent and approval of those whom you represent.

At the same time, I am deeply touched with the consideration of the circumstances under which and the time at which this gift is made. The idea was not formed when I was actively engaged before the public, either as a member of Parliament or a member of an Administration. I had not returned with friends and associates from any fresh political success. On the contrary, I was suffering from a severe and protracted illness. It was at a time when it was not unlikely that I should never again be able to return to public life. I was enfeebled and prostrate to an extent known only to my own family. And at that time your kindness and friendship were awakened, and you conceived the idea of doing me this honour and marking your approbation by this gift. I think, therefore, that more than on ordinary occasions I have reason to feel deeply grateful for the kindness you have manifested to me.

The subjects mentioned in your address might tempt one, if I were able to make it, to some review of the transactions we have acted in, or have been spectators of, during the last thirty years. Thirty years ago—and young men of this day are scarcely conscious what those times were—at that time the industry of this country was strangled by a relentless and cruel monopoly. The population was confined for its main article of food to the acreage and growth of these islands; and at every return of an indifferent or inferior harvest, famine walked abroad through all the homes of the poorest portion of the people. Now, I believe more than one-third of the population, more than ten millions of men, women, and children in the United Kingdom, derive their entire supply of the principal article of human food from foreign countries. At the same

time, we find that everybody—even every man who was opposed to us—has been a gainer by the change. Instead of our consuming in times of bad harvests all the grain of this country at high prices, at this moment in lands remote from ours, and remote from each other, wherever the sun shines and wherever the showers fall, there are harvests ripening, or being gathered, shipped, and sent to this country for the supply and sustentation of the increasing millions of our people. And that strange and cruel monopoly was but the centre, as it were, of a host of monopolies scarcely inferior to it in evil. When we regard the West Indies and the supply of sugar, every householder must know how much more abundant, how much better in quality, and how much cheaper in every way is the supply of that useful article through the country.

Take another monopoly or restriction—that upon ships. I mention this specially, because I remember that a great friend of mine, and your representative, the late John Lewis Ricardo, was the leader in the House of Commons of the movement to abolish the Navigation Laws. We were told by the ignorant simpletons who supported the then existing system that the English flag would be extinguished. I recollect walking up Parliament-street, in company with a procession of sailors, or pretended sailors, who had been brought down to present a petition in favour of the Navigation Laws. I asked one of them what was the matter; and he said they were going to present a petition in favour of the Navigation Laws. I said, 'What harm will it do you if things are changed?' and he said, 'They tell us we shall have nothing better to eat than black bread, the same as the Norwegians.' That was not a more ignorant thing to say than their leaders had said. No doubt they had been taught it by their leaders. What has happened? Probably no interest in the country is more extended or more prosperous. We have more numerous fleets, with larger ships, and costlier cargoes. Our traders,

with familiar keel, are on every ocean and in every sea, and they visit every shore. The mercantile marine of this country never at any former period occupied a position so high, when compared with that of other countries, as it does at the moment at which we are assembled.

But our attention has not been given solely to material interests and to the supply of food for the body. You have referred in your address to questions which bear upon the supply of food for the mind. No such change was ever seen in one department of public affairs as may be seen with regard to the public press. In the by-gone time to which I have referred every piece of paper which was called a newspaper had a tax upon it of 100 per cent.; the paper-maker was also compelled to pay another tax of 100 per cent.; and there was a duty of *1s. 6d.* upon every advertisement which appeared. These taxes came down chiefly from the days of Queen Anne. They were intended to strangle, if not to suppress, newspapers; and they had that effect to a great extent. Now, I believe, the newspaper property of the country is worth at least ten times as much, it may be twenty times as much, as when those taxes were in existence. Every man can have a newspaper now for a penny a-day. Men see what is going on all over the world, and almost, such is the swiftness with which news is collected, in a moment of time. There is going on, I have no doubt, a silent revolution in this country, by the vast extension of information through the newspaper press, which is permeating gradually through all ranks of society. Every one who judges impartially must admit at this time, if we look at the ability, the intelligence, and the general morality with which the press is conducted and written, that it is superior—largely superior—to that which we observed, those at least of us who were able to observe, in the condition of the press thirty or forty years ago.

You have referred to one other question, the question of the extension of the suffrage. We have had the Reform Bill of

1832 and that of 1867. The Bill of 1832 was a great Bill; but still it left two nations among the people—a small minority included, and a large majority excluded. The Bill of 1867, for which we all worked so many years, destroyed that distinction, and made the people one nation, having authority in one Parliament. The result was a great one, although the Act is still imperfect, and although no doubt before long there must be an increase of the franchise in counties, and there must be a better distribution of seats. Still the Bill is powerful enough to reform itself, and to give whatever changes may hereafter be found necessary. It was a result so great that it immediately enabled Parliament to do what Parliament had been totally incapable of doing in any previous time—to establish in Ireland for ever complete religious equality, and to bestow upon the vast body of the Irish agricultural peasantry and tenantry some real security for their property. No doubt both measures will work greatly to the advantage of Ireland, and in the issue it will be seen that Parliament never did anything more wisely, or with a more just intention, than when it passed these great measures of recent sessions. As to the question of parliamentary reform, we have seen within the last three days how much progress has been made. The House of Lords, which seems to be almost the last refuge of political ignorance and passion, has consented to the establishment of vote by ballot, by which perfect security and independence shall be given to every elector. They have unfortunately insisted on a reservation, a reservation which shows how little they know of the signs of the times, which must infallibly create embarrassment, and contest, and party strife. This might have been avoided, for they of all persons have the greatest interest in dispensing with them.

There are two questions which are not matters of legislation, but which I should like to say a sentence or two about. Your address refers to the question of foreign policy. The most important fact with regard to the foreign policy of this

country in our time has been the unhappy war with Russia. I opposed it, as you know, and I was obliged to oppose many of those with whom I generally agreed on other matters. Yet, looking back for fifteen years, to that time, I feel that I was never more justified in any political course which I have taken than I was on that occasion. I thought the objects of the war were vague and indefinite, and that so far as they were not indefinite they were altogether unattainable. I put aside for the moment the question of Christian principle; but I was absolutely opposed to squandering the treasure and shedding the blood of my countrymen on behalf of a cause which nobody could comprehend, as was clear, because nobody was ever able to explain it. Last year, only last year, we find the Government of this country—a Government, I will undertake to say, as liberal, and sagacious, and patriotic, whatever may have been their occasional errors, as any Government we ever had—a Government in which Mr. Gladstone is Prime Minister, and Earl Granville, who is intimately connected with your district, is a most important member—this Government consented, wisely and necessarily, to surrender what I believe was considered the principal result of the war with Russia—a surrender which ought not to have been necessary, because that which had been enforced upon Russia was what no independent and powerful country would ever long submit to.

The other question is one to which you have indirectly referred, the question of our policy with regard to the United States. It is one of the unaccountable things in history that people like ourselves—not the great body of the people, but Government, Parliament, the rich classes, and the most influential members of the press, or many of them—should for a moment have taken sides with a rebellion whose sole object and purpose was to perpetuate for ever the slavery of millions of human beings. I did not counsel interference. I said from the first, when the insurrection began, in a few obser-

vations which I made in the House of Commons—'Leave it alone; the United States are powerful enough to overcome all difficulties. I believe they will overcome this.' My object was to counsel what at one time I called a generous, and not an unfriendly, neutrality. I call you to witness, and the whole country to witness, whether, if we had pursued that course of generous neutrality, we should not have escaped embarrassments, negotiations, concessions, and humiliations to which we have been subjected for several years past. I hope and believe that, in all probability, the difficulties which have arisen will be terminated. I believe that the conduct of the Government has been everything which people could require in reference to this subject; and I speak from personal knowledge of the most intimate character when I say that no men in this country are more anxious for all difficulties to be removed, and that the United Kingdom, and the United States, should live together in perfect amity, than the men who have the responsibility at the present time of administering the Executive Government of this country. In saying this, I hope no one will assume that I am pretending to be wiser than my neighbours. There are thousands, nay, hundreds of thousands, who during all this same period have held the same opinions I have held, and have recommended or wished for the same policy. But they had not the same opportunity for speech and action which I had. I have always felt that there were good men in all parts of the country who sympathised with me, and who would, so far as they had the power, give their warmest support to the course and policy which I was engaged in pursuing.

Let us look for a moment, and only for a moment, at the great change which thirty years have made. There are countries which have gone through strange and sanguinary revolutions, and have not been able to make changes so wise and so wholly satisfactory. If those changes had not been made, I will undertake to say that if the Corn Laws had been

maintained, if there had been a power which could have maintained them in their unrestricted and cruel character, nothing less than anarchy and insurrection could have followed.

'For men will break in their sublime despair
The bonds which nature can no longer bear.'

Yet all this has been done in this country with scarcely a single hour's serious riot, and without, so far as I remember, the sacrifice of a single drop of blood. I suppose there is yet a party in this country which complains of everything that we have said, and nearly everything that we have done. They have obstructed everything, they have contested every point, and they appear to be so ignorant and incapable of discussing these questions and considering them, that they may be said to be absolutely incurable. That party still appeals, in all its ancient audacity, to the support of the people. I think about the only consolation we have—and it is one dictated by Christian charity—is that they may partake, opponents though they have been—partake fully of the good things which we have provided for them: for as the sun shines and the rain descends alike on just and unjust, so the blessings of a wise and beneficent legislation are participated in, not more fully by those who have promoted it than by those who have pertinaciously obstructed it. I know not that there is more to be said. I have said perhaps more than was necessary for an occasion of this kind. I have only to thank you, as I do from my heart, for your kindness, your wonderful kindness, to me. I hope, as you have the opportunity, you will convey to those whom you represent my feelings on this question and this occasion. I know of no occasion on which I have felt myself under more deep obligation to any gentlemen than to those whom I have the privilege to address. At the same time, whilst I thank you, and whilst accepting this magnificent present, I am humbly conscious how little I have been able to do to merit the signal honour which you have conferred upon me.

XIII.

BIRMINGHAM, OCTOBER 22, 1873.

[On this day Mr. Bright addressed his constituents for the first time after the serious illness which attacked him in the winter of 1870–1. He had just before accepted the office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and sought re-election from his constituents. The speech was made in Bingley Hall, a building capable it is said of holding 20,000 persons.]

It is now nearly four years since I was permitted to stand face to face with my constituents. I was, as you know, withdrawn from public labour and from your service by a severe and protracted illness. I have often regretted very much that when my health failed I did not at once return into your hands the trust that you had confided to me. My individual judgment was overruled by the opinion and advice of my friends. I was afraid that to retain my seat would in some degree tend to impair that sense of responsibility which I think should always attach to the position of a representative of the people; but if in any degree that has happened, I am consoled by the thought that we have some compensation in having witnessed the generosity and the forbearance with which a great popular constituency can treat its representatives.

It is almost five years since I stood in this hall, and was re-elected after having accepted office in the Administration then just formed by Mr. Gladstone. I asked your sanction for the step I had taken, and you freely gave it. Again, after the

lapse of five years, I have been induced, with much hesitation and much difficulty, again to accept office in the same Administration, and I have asked you again to sanction the step I have taken, and you have freely and without contest sanctioned it. I need hardly tell you that my heart is full of thanks for this fresh manifestation of your confidence and your good opinion. But standing here, after these five years, it is impossible that one should not look back a little to what has happened, not with the view of giving a catalogue of the measures that have been passed, or with the view of entering into enthusiastic laudation of the Administration which has existed, but because it is worth our while to observe what are the great principles that during the last five years have been adopted and fixed irrevocably in the policy and legislation of England by the consent of Parliament, and by the knowledge and assent of the country. I say that these five years are memorable years—that the Administration will live, and that its measures will bear comparison with those of any Government which has ever preceded it.

A few years ago it was thought an impossible thing to remove an Established Church, and yet an Established Church—I speak of the political institution only—an Established Church has been removed, while the Church remains. And what does that mean? It means that the property of that political institution has been, to a large extent, recovered by the State; it means that a number of bishops have been removed from the House of Lords; and we have lived to be convinced, such of us as were not convinced before, that a Church may exist and religion may prosper without the support of the State. At this moment we see in Ireland a Protestant Episcopal Church in perfectly good health, and endeavouring honestly to free itself from certain errors and things superstitious, which it fancied it had been rid of three hundred years ago. But we have established another principle during these years, with regard to notions about the absolute ownership or sacredness

of landed property. I am as much for fair dealing with rich people as with poor ones. I think something good has been done when Parliament has shown that the rights, and interests, and homes of the people are as sacred as certain absolute rights of property that have been assumed to vest in the landlord. As far as I can understand, in regard to Ireland, there is no diminution of rent; there is no insecurity in its payment. No class in that country can be shown to have suffered by the great measure which passed in the year 1870.

Another great principle has been established—that office, authority, dignity, in a great service of the State which spends ten or eleven millions a year, shall not henceforth be bought by the rich to the exclusion of those that are less rich, or are poor, and that promotion in the army is no longer to be obtained upon the old, and I will say the corrupt, terms. The corruption market is closed for ever in that department of the public service. Unfortunately there is still a purchase of office of the highest character in another branch—that of the Church established. I was glad to see, a few days ago, that a Bishop, who is very active in my county, condemned this, and I think described it as a scandalous thing. I say that it is odious in any function, but it is specially scandalous within the organisation of a Christian Church. I sometimes ask myself what would be said if it were proposed to be introduced into the Wesleyan body, or among the Independents or Baptists, or the Presbyterians in Scotland, or even in the Catholic Church in Ireland. It exists only in the Established Church in England, and I trust the time will come when the members of that Church will regard it in the light that it is regarded, I believe, by all persons outside and unconnected with that Church.

There is another principle that has been established which must interest many here, and that is that the franchise is the right of the elector; that the employer and the landlord, the creditor and customer, have no right to ask a man to

give his vote against the opinion and the conscience of the voter. I was told lately that the Conservative editors spoke in kindly terms of the Ballot when they won an election, but that, when they lost an election, they turned and cursed it. Whether we win elections or lose them, I am for the Ballot; and I suspect that the longer it remains a part of our electoral system the more impossible will it be to remove it.

There was another principle that was established that was of value, and that was that the House of Peers should no longer continue to be the highest court of justice in the kingdom. I am not about to say a syllable against the manner in which many eminent men have endeavoured to discharge the duty of judges in that assembly, but I say it is better to have a regular court, with regularly appointed and paid judges—a court that sits for a much longer time during the year, and a court that I believe will dispose of the business before it with less delay and less cost than has hitherto been the case. There is only one thing further that I would mention, and that is the one that has been referred to in terms of great severity by my friend Mr. Chamberlain, who seconded the resolution. The State, that is the country acting through Parliament and the Crown, has admitted its responsibility for the education of the people by public grants, by public rates, and by the partial application of the power of compulsion. The education of the children of the country is henceforward to be provided for by the State. That is a great principle, which has never been adopted in this country before. I ask you to look at the various points I have mentioned; examine, if you can, their importance, and then you will see what is the character of the work that has been accomplished by one Parliament, under the advice and under the direction of one Administration.

But I must dwell for a moment or two upon the last question to which I have referred. I was not in Parliament when the Education Bill passed. It was not at any time, so far as I remember, submitted to the Cabinet whilst I was in

the practice of meeting with my colleagues. I was a member of the Administration, but I was withdrawn from it by illness so severe that during months of that Session of 1871 I knew nothing of what was taking place within the walls of Parliament. I could read no debate and no speech myself, and I was too prostrate for it to be safe for any of my family to read such news to me. I give this explanation, not for the sake of saying that somebody else did it and I did not, but because it has been said, and in a very important newspaper, that I was one of those who were concerned in that measure, and had given my assent to it. I think the original fault in the whole of that Bill was in submitting to Parliament a great measure on a subject which had not been sufficiently discussed in public, and about which the public mind had neither been fixed nor enlightened; and I am obliged to say, judging from what I have heard since, that it appears to me that almost everybody concerned in it was a little in the dark, and that the measure as it came out from Parliament, and as it has been worked, has somewhat disappointed nearly everybody that was concerned in it.

I will tell you my opinion of the Bill in as few words as I can, because I want you to understand that I am not speaking here at all in the capacity of a member of the Administration, but as one of the representatives of the electors of Birmingham. I hope I shall say nothing and do nothing which is inconsistent with either character. The Education Bill was supposed to be needed because the system that had existed up to 1870 was held to be insufficient and bad; and the fault of the Bill, in my mind, is that it has extended and confirmed the system which it ought in point of fact to have superseded. It was a Bill—I speak of it as it passed, and combined with the changes brought about by the Minutes of the Privy Council which came into force with it—it was a Bill to encourage Denominational education, and, where that was impossible, to establish Board schools. It ought, in my

opinion, to have been a Bill to establish Board schools, and to offer inducements to those who were connected with Denominational schools to bring them under the control of the Privy Council. The fact is, and it is notorious, that the Denominational system in this country must of necessity in the main be an Established Church system, because from the parochial organisation of the Church—although it does not include within its pale more than one-half of the church-going people of the nation—yet by its parochial organisation and the unity which this organisation implies—it can, of course, place schools in every parish where the divided and many-sected Nonconformists are unable to do so; and the result, as we have seen, is that the Nonconformists are aggrieved, and justly aggrieved. I suppose there are probably thousands of parishes in which there will scarcely be any schools except Church schools to which the children of Nonconformists can go; and they must either in those schools receive the religious education which is given, or shun or be withdrawn from religious education altogether. A great deal has been said about a certain clause of that Bill. It is a clause which collects rates from all ratepayers—I speak now especially of Nonconformist ratepayers—and applies those rates partly to the support of Catholic schools, and very much more to the support of Church of England schools, over which the ratepayers have no kind of control whatever. That, I think, is an evil principle, and one that should not be continued. But I am bound to say that I do not think the clause, as left in the Bill, was supposed to be capable of exciting the disapprobation which has arisen on account of it. For myself, I have not publicly in any public meeting discussed the subject since it has come before the nation; but I will say what I think with regard to the question of education through the sects. I believe that it is not possible ever to make it truly national or truly good. The fact is, and I think we all feel it, that the public do not take a great interest in Denominational schools.

The Church cares nothing for Dissent; and with regard to that matter, Dissent cares just as little for the Church. The people regard their schools as Church schools and Chapel schools; they do not regard them as public and national schools, and as supporting a great system, in which the whole people unite for a great and national object. Then, again, with regard to the School Boards. I do not know that the Government of that day were responsible for the mode of electing School Boards. It was not certainly in the original memorandum of the Bill which I was permitted to see; but the mode of election appears to me about the worst for purposes of general and national education that could possibly have been devised. When a contest comes for a School Board, the real question of education seems hardly ever thought of; it is a squabble between Church and Chapel and Secularist, and I do not know how many factions besides. When the School Board meets, there are the priest, the parson, and the minister, and their partisans, but there is no free breeze of public opinion passing through them. It is an unwholesome atmosphere of what I would call sectarian exclusiveness, and sometimes of bigotry, in which nothing can thrive.

And now with regard to one or two points which have been much discussed, particularly that of the 25th clause. Whatever is said about it in the country, I believe that there are many worthy and honourable men on the opposite side of the House to that on which I sit who would be very glad to see some arrangement come to with regard to that clause; because, so long as this remains a matter of dispute, it is obvious that whatever good can be got out of what I call an insufficient measure, and therefore one not calculated to yield great good, will be checked. It is desirable for every party that something more like harmony should be introduced into the public action in the great Education question. And therefore, expressing only my own opinion, I say that I believe there is a mode, and a simple and a just mode, by

which everything may be brought about that is now proposed to be done under the 25th clause, and that is the repeal of the clause. But with regard to the great question which lies behind it, whether we are on the right track of a good sound education for our children, under the Denominational system or not, that must be left to further proof; for I admit that multitudes differ from me and from you; though I cannot but believe that further experience and something like failure will before long force upon Parliament and the country a general reconsideration of the question.

In speaking of the five years, I have said nothing of the minor measures, and I will say nothing of them. I have said nothing about lessened taxation. I have not touched yet upon one question which I think ought not to be passed over, and that is the course of the Government in the settlement of the dispute with the United States. Mr. Chamberlain, I think, referred to a speech made the other day by an eminent member of the House of Lords, in which a noble Marquis insisted that the Government which turned one cheek meekly to the United States and another meekly to Russia, had only a bold front for a savage African nation. With regard to the savage African nation, I will undertake to say that there are not fifteen men in this room more anxious to avoid war with the African nation, or who will be more disposed by all possible and reasonable pacific measures to adjust the troubles which have arisen on that continent, than her Majesty's Ministers are. The time may come —and I trust before long—when Parliament, acting on the opinion of one of its own committees, will consider that it will be wise to withdraw absolutely from that coast. There is no slave trade there to put an end to now. Trade flourishes better where there are no forts than where they are to be found. The country I am speaking of is one in which English life is scarcely to be maintained, and I believe the interest and the honour of Great Britain at some not distant

period will be best consulted by an entire withdrawal from that coast.

But, as to America, they talk of this Treaty of 1872 as if it were a great humiliation to England. No! The humiliation was not in 1872; it took place between the years 1861 and 1865. Many of you met me in the Town-hall during the period that elapsed between the years I have mentioned, and we discussed the American question. If the Government of this country had treated the United States with what I termed a generous neutrality, if the rich people in this country had not in the main sided with the insurrectionary planters of the South, if the writers attached to many of our most important newspapers had dealt fairly with their kinsmen on the other side of the Atlantic, there would have been no dispute between the United Kingdom and the United States. But a dispute arose; and what was it the duty of the Government to do? To let it rankle and fester until it grew to something that was grievous to both nations, and to the world? No. They took office when the question was manageable. They trod in the steps of a member of the previous Government, the present Lord Derby, who had been Foreign Secretary; for it was Lord Derby, and I say it to his honour, who first of all admitted the propriety of arbitration between the United States and England. Any one may say that the terms were not settled, and that this Government conceded too much. Well, I venture to say this—that twenty or fifty years hence, when the pen of history narrates what has been done with regard to this question, it will say that the treaty, the arbitration, and the conduct of Earl Granville and Mr. Gladstone and their colleagues, added a nobler chapter to the History of England than if they had filled it with the records of bloody battles.

I have asked you to look back a little over the time which has passed since the last general election. It is worth while now to look forward a little to the general election, which

in all probability will be upon us before the next twelve months. Now, when the election of 1868 took place, five years ago, there was an enormous majority in favour of the Liberal party. Why? I presume it was because the Liberal party expected some work to be done. They required it to be done. The national mind had risen to the height of disposing of certain questions. I should like to ask whether that work in the main has not been done, and well done, too? I have found fault with only one measure; generally the public—I speak of the Liberal public—have found fault with only one measure. Of course, our opponents found fault with every measure. But, having come to this point, that a Ministry which you in part elected—for I was a member of it—has been doing for five years what you asked it to do, and expected it to do, our friends of the Opposition come to you and say, 'You had better discharge the workmen that have been doing so well for you during the last five years; and more than that, you should engage the party that has for five years done nothing but obstruct and resist those workmen.' It may be a question whether you want anything more to be done. Even if you did not, it would be advisable to retain the servants that have done so well. But if you want more to be done, then it would seem to me to be very necessary to retain those who are willing to do something rather than those who for five years past have done nothing but obstruct.

Now shall I just mention two or three things which are coming to the front? I will not go into fancy questions, theories, or speculations, that we shall perhaps never have to consider, but I will take one matter that must be interesting to this vast meeting. We must be some thousands here present, and there must be some thousands amongst us who had no votes a few years ago. It was obvious, when the borough franchise was brought down to the householders, that the county franchise could not possibly remain where it

was. That is a question that is every day becoming nearer. How near it is I will not say, because I am not able to say, but it is a question that is intimately connected with another not less important, and that is the redistribution of political power. Let me ask you whether you would like our friends in the Opposition to have the introduction of a Bill and the arrangement of the clauses which would determine, if Parliament should sanction it, the number of members to be given, for instance, to the metropolis, to Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, and all great cities in the United Kingdom? I would rather have it in the hands of men who have a sympathy with the true and honest representation of the country. I object to the Opposition coming in to deal with a matter of this kind.

There is another question which Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Wright, I believe, referred to, which is the question of the land. You know what has happened. By great efforts we were enabled to free the produce of the land. I know it was the opinion of my dear friend Cobden that the freedom of the land would be as great a boon to the country as was the freedom of the produce of the soil. It is a question of the intensest interest to the working classes of the country. I am delighted—as I hope thousands and thousands who have no immediate connexion with them are—I am delighted to see some movement and stir amongst the class of agricultural labourers. But do not assume that it is in the power of organisation, especially in a scattered class as they are, to permanently and greatly raise the rate of wages. What the agricultural class in this country requires is that the land shall be made absolutely free; that there should be steps by which the best, the cleverest, the most industrious, the most frugal of the agricultural labourers should gradually make their way to a better and a higher social level. That can never be with land laws such as we have—land laws which tend everywhere to the forming great estates and

great farms which are altogether beyond the reach or the expectation or the dream of the agricultural labourer. That is a question which will have to be dealt with very soon. Last Session a Bill was introduced by the present Lord Chancellor with a view to make more easy and more cheap the transfer of land—of course, I mean by purchase. Other Bills must be introduced before long on the question. The question cannot sleep, and it is as necessary for the landowners themselves that it should be dealt with as it is for the agricultural labourers to seek how they may better their poor and abject condition. There are other laws which affect land—the law of landlord and tenant, and the question of the preservation of game. That is a matter which will have to be dealt with, and with some degree of force, before long. It seems to be monstrous that tenant-farmers should occupy land, paying rent for it, and that they should not have absolute property in all that lives upon the soil.

There are two or three other questions which I must just refer to, which have been called workmen's questions. For instance, there is one that was dealt with, or rather that was attempted to be dealt with, last Session, with regard to the law of conspiracy. There is another which is called the Masters and Servants Act. There is another that has reference to what is called molestation. I am not prepared to say that Parliament would consent, or ought to consent, with regard at least to two of these measures, to do everything that has been suggested; but I am of opinion that with regard to all three of them, concession or alteration may be made, which would be just to all other classes of the community, and will be satisfactory to all reasonable and thoughtful men among the working classes.

Then I come to the question of expenditure. The public, I am sorry to say, during prosperous years have been so much attending to their own personal expenditure, which has greatly increased, that they seem to have forgotten the

expenditure of the Administration. But the question of expenditure is a very serious one. I have heard in the House of Commons, from the leader of the Opposition and from the leader of the Administration, condemnation in the strongest language of the extravagant expenditure of the country; and it is for the most part, although not altogether, in the military expenditure that the extravagance is most witnessed. You will have by and by a Budget. There is a Budget every year, and whilst we are at peace, and acting like a rational and peaceful nation, the Budget generally, on the whole, is rather a pleasant thing than otherwise. Looking back to the Budgets which we had some years ago, it may be that the Budget of the next Session may cause interest, and I hope it may cause pleasure. I know no secrets. There is one thing, however, which I can tell you. The Cabinet secrets are not made up till November, and as we are yet only at the 22nd of October, of course it is impossible that I should be able to tell you anything, however much I might wish to do so. But this we all know, that there are two questions which interest people when they speak about the Budget, and the surplus, and the diminution of the taxation. Some feel very sore about the question of the income tax. I don't wonder at it. It is most unequal, and it tempts men to great dishonesty. Then there is the question of a free breakfast table—tea, sugar, and coffee. Well, there is abundant room here for the most enterprising Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he has a surplus, to gratify the people of the United Kingdom, but I am in favour of leaving these matters in the hands—I am not now speaking of the present Government, or of Mr. Gladstone—in the hands of the Liberal party, and of a Liberal Administration.

I have not touched upon certain questions about which some men are interesting themselves. I agree with one of the greatest men England or the world has ever produced,

when he said, 'To know that which before us lies in daily life is the prime wisdom,' and therefore I prefer to deal with the questions which are in the front, which are coming near to us, which the public mind is thinking of, and discussing, and settling, because the public mind often settles these questions before they are discussed and settled by Parliament. I prefer to deal with the practical questions that are before us rather than to run into speculations on some grave questions which must wait their own time, their own time not being certainly the present. I say then, looking at the past, whom shall we trust? I am not about to compare rival Ministers. I shall certainly not compare the First Minister, the leader of the present Administration, with the writer of the Bath letter. I would rather compare parties than rival Ministers. Suppose, now, next year, when we have a general election, the result throughout the United Kingdom should be to continue a large majority of the Liberal party, what will be the result? During the currency of the coming Parliament another chapter of great and noble measures will be added to the Parliamentary history of the time. Our policy is known—not every particular measure, not every particular clause, but the policy of the Liberal party is known. It is before the public; it is not concealed; it is no mystery. But what is the policy of the Opposition? We were told the other day that the leader of the Opposition was 'in a state of strict seclusion,' and, but for that strange and unfortunate epistolary outburst we should have had no idea of the desperate state of mind in which he has been. But still, if we ask for the policy of the Opposition, all is impenetrably dark, and all that we know is that nothing can be known. I beg pardon, though; I am wrong in that. We know that according to the Opposition all the doings of the past five years, and if you like of all the past forty years, are evil; but, as to the future, you will see when it comes.

But let me tell you this—that the great statesmanship which consists in silence and secrecy is not original—it is a mere copy. Thirty or forty years ago—I recollect the time very well—there was a great fever and mania of speculation, and men went into every thing—they generally came out with nothing. I recollect quite well the advertisement of a Great Sunflower Company, and if anybody had proposed so unsubstantial a speculation as the equinoctial line, people would have taken shares in that. Now at that time there was a very ingenious fellow; if I could remember his name I would try to immortalise him. He was a very ingenious fellow, and he put out a prospectus. He was what they call the 'promoter' of a great company, which was to have a large capital, and a great number of shares, and great profits. All this was to work a great invention—everything was great about it, but what it was was a great secret; indeed it was so profound a secret that until all the money was paid in nobody was to know what it was. Now that is the Conservative policy at this moment. They have a policy which they offer for the coming election, but it is a profound secret. When you have all given your votes and returned a Conservative majority, perhaps they will tell you what it is. I mentioned forty years. Lord Salisbury referred to those forty years in his speech. It is a difficult matter for one of our Conservative friends to get over such forty years as we have had in this country; and during the whole of that time the Liberal party has been in power; for when it was not in office it was in power. Sir Robert Peel came into office in the year 1841, and left office in the year 1846, and his renown, the reverence which we pay his memory, all that which his family now hold dear, he purchased by wisely doing that which the Anti-Corn Law League for so many years had advocated. The other day when the Earl of Derby and Mr. Disraeli were in office, what did they do but pass the very measure which you and I had discussed

over and over again in your Town Hall? Therefore, as regards the forty years that the Liberal party have been in power, and have ruled in this country, I am entitled to claim for them the merit and glory of the administration and legislation of that remarkable period. The changes have been great, I admit, but the improvements have been as great as the changes. Look what a growth of content there has been throughout the country; look what a growth of peace there has been, and of national prosperity and comfort among every class. If I could take all the men here with grey heads, or all the men who have passed over sixty years of age—and they are not a few—and were to ask them to tell us what was the state of things when they were twenty or thirty years old, they would be able to show that this country has gone through a beneficent revolution in regard to the condition of the great body of the working classes. I believe all that has come from the long period of peace and the changes that have been made in the legislation of the country by the Liberal party.

I will tell you a little anecdote about this, and one which I think will interest you. I have been reading lately a great number of letters which were addressed to me by my dear friend Mr. Cobden during our long friendship, and I have read also a journal consisting of memoranda narrating what took place in Paris, when he was there negotiating the Commercial Treaty with France. He had to try to persuade the Emperor Napoleon to follow the example of this country with regard to the reduction of import duties, and the establishment of something like freedom of trade. He told the Emperor how great the benefits had been of the policy of Sir Robert Peel, and how great was the regard and reverence felt for Sir Robert Peel. The Emperor said that he should be charmed and flattered if he could think it possible that he could do things of a kind which would be so good for his country. 'But,' he added, 'it is very difficult in France. In England

you make reforms, in France we make revolutions.' Now, observe, the Emperor was a man who had lived in this country for years; he had watched the working of public opinion and of our institutions from the retirement of his exile, and afterwards for nearly twenty years he observed them from the lofty stage of the Imperial throne; and that was his judgment; that was the statement which he made to one of the foremost Englishmen, representing much of English opinion, sent by the English Government to negotiate with him the great Treaty of Commerce. But I believe that there is not a thoughtful statesman in any civilized country in the world who would not join with the Emperor in expressing his admiration of the manner in which the people of this country, for the last forty years, have worked out such substantial reforms in their legislation, and our own experience brings us to the same conclusion.

Those men are in error who tell you that nothing has been done, and that all remains to be done; those men are not less in error who tell you that what has been done is evil, and that it is evil to do anything more. What you should do is to act upon the principles and the rules of past years, steadily advancing in favour of questions which the public has thoroughly discussed, which it thoroughly comprehends, and which Parliament can honestly and conscientiously put into law. For my part, looking back over these forty years, I feel some little sense of content. But it does not in the least degree lessen—on the contrary, it rather adds to and strengthens my hope for the future. The history of the last forty years of this country, judged fairly—I speak of its legislation—is mainly a history of the conquests of freedom. It will be a grand volume that tells the story, and your name and mine, if I mistake not, will be found in some of its pages. For me, the final chapter is now writing. It may be already written; but for you, this great constituency, you have a perpetual youth and a perpetual

future. I pray Heaven that in the years to come, when my voice is hushed, you may be granted strength, and moderation, and wisdom to influence the councils of your country by righteous means, for none other than noble and righteous ends.

XIV.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 31, 1874.

[At the General Election of 1874, Messrs. Bright, Dixon, and Muntz were returned unopposed. There had been some talk of bringing forward a 'working man representative,' but the project, if it had been seriously entertained, collapsed, and the proposed candidate went away to Sheffield to assist in the candidature of Mr. Chamberlain, who subsequently took Mr. Dixon's place in the representation of Birmingham.]

It is a little over three months since I had the pleasure of meeting you, on which occasion you renewed the expression of your confidence in me as one of your Parliamentary representatives. Since then, entirely unexpected by me at that time, as by you, there has occurred a dissolution of Parliament, unforeseen and most sudden. With regard to its causes, I may tell you frankly and honestly that those causes are set forth most clearly in the address of the Prime Minister to his late constituents; and when you have read that, you know as much about it as is necessary for you to know—and more, as much as can be known, and as much as I know. But sudden and unexpected as the dissolution was, it did not find Birmingham unprepared, and if there be reaction anywhere, apparently the infection has not spread to this great central city of the country. You are not prepared to turn your backs upon the policy of the last five years. You are not prepared to withdraw your confidence from those who have been your representatives during that period, although, unfortunately, I have

been able to render you small service during that time. And as you stand by the grave of the dead Parliament, I am sure, whether you speak its funeral oration or you write its epitaph, you will be willing to say that it is one of the best and noblest of the Parliaments whose doings have made the story of English history during many centuries past. But our opponents—if it were not so they would not be our opponents—do not agree with us; but they are an unhappy party. Whether in or out, they seem to me alike unfortunate. I have watched their agonies for thirty years. During that time, according to them, the Constitution has received some scores of serious wounds, and several of those wounds, though it is curious to say so, have been pronounced fatal. They say that we—that is, the Liberal party—have disturbed classes and interests unnecessarily, that we have harassed almost all sorts of people, and have made ourselves very unpopular thereby. Without doubt, if they had been in the Wilderness, they would have condemned the Ten Commandments as a harassing piece of legislation, though it does happen that we have the evidence of more than thirty centuries to the wisdom and usefulness of those Commandments. Well, I plead guilty to the charge that we have disturbed a good many classes and a good many interests, but then, in pleading that, I offer as the justification that in no single case have we injured a class or interest, and in every case we have greatly benefited the country.

We seem to have had lately a new period marked out for us—the period of forty years. Lord Grey was a great minister, who began the process of disturbance—I speak of disturbance under the Liberal party. He, as you know, greatly disturbed the borough-mongers. I recollect reading the account of Lord John Russell's famous speech in introducing the Reform Bill, and some member—I forget now his name, but I think he was not much of a borough-monger, if at all—said, as he heard the speech and the gradual explanation of that great measure, his hair stood on end. And what

must have been its effect I know not upon that rich banker at Leeds, of whom, I think, I have once before spoken to you, who said that if the members for Gatton and Old Sarum, or any two of them, were transferred to Leeds he should dread the tumult of Leeds elections, and he should think it necessary to remove his bank, with his gold and silver, to some quiet town like Pomfret. But then the result of the disturbance of the borough-mongers was this—that the country was saved from anarchy and civil war, and that the passing of that great measure made the growth of the tree of freedom in this country certain and perpetual. And not long after, we disturbed another comfortable set of people. I mean those who in that day were called the 'old corporators'—the men who were the officials of the corrupt and unreformed Corporations of the country. These persons were busy mostly in all kinds of jobbery for their own interests with the funds of the Corporations. I am told that in one town not far from here, the Corporation regularly sold the seats in Parliament, and applied the money, under an economical and in some respects a judicious plan, to the improvement of the town. What would you think if the Corporation put up the three seats for Birmingham in the market—in the political market—offered some of those great contractors, Australian merchants, and great landed proprietors, permanent seats in Parliament, as members for Birmingham, if they would give you ten or twenty thousand pounds a-piece, and then you were to apply that money to some purposes of Birmingham improvement? Well, that was what was done, I am told, in a borough not far from this town. But after the Reform Bill—the Corporation Reform Bill—was passed, a new state of things arose, and we have had since then, I think everybody must admit—taking into consideration the state of the intelligence and virtue of our population—we have had in all our great boroughs a very admirable system of local and municipal government.

But the reformed Parliament went on with these disturb-

ances. The people of England heard the wail of anguish from the West Indian colonies; every breeze from the west brought with it the sound of the torture and the sufferings of near a million of the population. And the Liberal party—for it was they who did it—they not only heard this, but they resolved to abate the evil, and they did it in a manner by which they offered what I will call lavish justice and consideration to the planters, at the same time that they extended perfect and complete mercy to the slave. And by and by there came up another great question. Failing harvests, and failing trade, and a suffering people, created a combination to abolish the hated system of Protection. Trade was strangled, the poor were stricken with famine. And then we disturbed lords, and dukes, and squires, and farmers, and, I am sorry to say, not a few clergymen, who were distressed and harassed to an alarming extent. One duke, if I recollect aright, said that the country would not be worth living in, and that they should go abroad. But a Sussex peasant, not a distant neighbour, I suspect, of the duke, asked, 'They bean't going to take the land wi' 'em, be they?' And the duke, as you know, did not go abroad. He remained to the end of his life as much attached as ever to his ancestral acres; and now, doubtless, he sleeps tranquilly in that small portion of his vast estates which is enough finally for the great duke or for the peasant. Well, but the dukes were not all. The farmers thought they were injured, and Mr. Chowler—you recollect Mr. Chowler—said they had more horses than anybody else, and knew how to ride 'em, and they would rather ride down upon Manchester than upon Paris; but fortunately for that industrious, unwalled, and undefended town, Mr. Chowler relented, and Manchester was spared.

But five-and-twenty years have passed since that disturbance, and the harassing of these great events, and where are we now? Every duke, and lord, and squire, and parson, and peasant, and manufacturer, and merchant, and artisan,

and labourer, and miner, and man and woman of every class in this country, is happier and more content by the disturbance. Out of the five-and-twenty years that are past, I suppose the whole food of the people of this country for about ten years has been imported from abroad. Trade has extended to fourfold its then amount, work is far more plentiful and more steady, as you all know: wages are from twenty to fifty per cent. higher throughout the country, and the farm labourer—a writer in the *Saturday Review* not long ago said that if the farm labourer is a son of agriculture, he is a disinherited child—the farm labourer, abject and suffering, and neglected, is now finding that the beneficent shower is even descending upon him. I have heard Mr. Disraeli in the House of Commons, when claiming from Parliament compensation for the land for the abolition of the Corn Laws; I have heard him say that he would rest his whole case upon the condition, that is upon the future condition, of the agricultural labourer. Well, I met about a year ago a man doing some work for my firm under a contractor; he was looking rather weakly and ill, and I entered into conversation with him, and asked him where he came from. He said he was just recovering from an illness of many weeks; that he had only just returned to his work; that he was a native of the county of Buckingham, Mr. Disraeli's own county. He said that when he was a lad, and that was about thirty years ago, his father went to work regularly for the wages of 7*s.* a week; and he said further, that 'When I left Buckinghamshire wages had got up to 11*s.*; and,' he says, 'I have heard lately that they are at 14*s.*' Therefore, I say that the disturbance that set free the industry of this country, which doubled the wages of the humble labourer, amongst whom Mr. Disraeli moves when he is at his country home—that this disturbance is not to be condemned, but is one of those great things for which we may take credit, and in which we may glory.

Now, if there was nobody to speak but myself, and I were able to do it, I might go through I know not how many cases of the same kind. One or two I will refer to. Take the case of the shipping interest for example. The great shipowners were terrified because the Navigation Laws were to be repealed, and it was said that your mercantile navy would rot in your harbours, and your imperial navy would have no support. What happened? But that was not all that was said. I am not sure that I did not once before tell you of the observation of a sailor to me upon this subject. He had come down with two or three hundred to the House of Commons to bring a petition to the House praying them not to abolish the Navigation Laws. I walked up Parliament Street with this procession, and I entered into conversation with one of these simple-minded sailors. I asked him what he had been about, and he said he had been down to the House of Commons; they had taken a very great petition against the repeal of these Navigation Laws. I said to him, 'What harm will it do you?' and he said 'I do not know much about it myself, but they tell us that if the Navigation Laws are repealed, we shall all of us never get nothing to eat again but black bread, like them Norwegians.' That was the absurdity which—I will not mention names—shipowners and active men of that agitation, taught these poor sailors, who really, as you know, knew nothing about it. But the result of the abolition of the Navigation Laws, and the establishment of free trade, has been a prosperity absolutely unconceived before by the shipping interests, in the vastness of your mercantile marine, in the magnificence of your ships. Now, there is not a sea, there is not a bay, there is not a harbour, there is not a part of the watery surface of the globe in which your magnificent merchant ships are not sailing. And no doubt the shipping interest would be very sorry to go back to the system which we attacked, and which they upheld.

There is one point to which I must ask the working men to pay particular attention, and it is the newspaper press. The newspaper press thirty years ago was strangled by taxes. They durst not do as they do in Paris—they durst not take up newspaper editors and suppress newspapers from day to day, as they pleased; but they put taxes on which strangled the newspapers, and only dear newspapers could exist. The paper itself had a tax upon it—the Excise tax—nearly equal to the value of the paper. It had a stamp at one corner absolutely exceeding the value of the paper. And then, every advertisement at that time, although it was only a line—'Wanted, a Gardener; enquire so and so'—bore a tax of eighteenpence, which is three times as much as you now pay the newspaper for the advertisement itself. And thus the newspapers were to a large extent strangled and destroyed—they could not come into existence, in fact. Now, you will bear in mind, those of you who recollect what took place, the first tax that came off was the advertisement duty; the next that came off was the stamp, and the last was the excise upon paper. All the prosperous—not all, but many of the prosperous papers of the country, were very much disturbed and harassed; they were a harassed interest. The *Times* grieved dreadfully about it. What a foolish business it was when Lord Derby—the late Lord Derby—I think, the most passionate and ignorant of political leaders—brought the majority of the House of Lords to reject the Bill for the repeal of the paper duty, after Mr. Gladstone had passed it in the House of Commons. Surely, if there were a class of persons in this kingdom to whom it was necessary to give a true knowledge of facts and some kind of decent political education, it was the Tory party. And they, apparently—if I may use a Miltonic phrase—'unconscious of their own disfigurement,' and of their own ignorance, actually rejected the means which we offered them of getting this great teaching machinery for their benefit.

One more little thing—a small thing now it has passed. For thirty years in the House of Commons men contested the question of the Church rate. What did the clergy say—not all, but a great many—but what did their friends in the House of Commons say? If you abolish the Church rate, if you do not take from the Independents, the Wesleyans, the Baptists, and all the rest of them, small sums to keep up the churches, the churches will go to decay. It was a scandalous imputation upon Churchmen. But what happened? A clergyman, speaking to me this very week about it, said, 'I believe there is not anybody in the kingdom who is any worse for the abolition of Church rates, nor is there any single church in the kingdom, I believe, that is more allowed to go into decay than before Church rates were abolished.' We harassed those persons a great deal at the time, but it was for the public good, and it was for their good, and everybody feels in every parish that there is greater harmony, more of that which the Christian religion teaches, than there was while that impost was continued. And now, passing only to within the last Parliament, to that question of the Irish Church—I am quite aware—I know it is true—that many good men were disturbed and harassed by the course which Parliament felt it its duty to take. I met in Ireland, before the passing of that Bill, and just about the time when the resolutions were agreed to in the preceding Parliament in favour of the abolition of the Irish Church—I met with a clergyman in Ireland, of the Established Church, to whom I was talking upon this subject. He was very much disturbed and very anxious. I had great sympathy with him, for he spoke on the subject in a voice tremulous with emotion, and he gave me this answer—and it was a sort of consolation to him. He said, 'I fear this great trial is come upon us because of our unfaithfulness to our Divine Master.' Well, my own impression is, that if ever there was a measure which passed a House of Legislature conformable—undoubtedly

comformable—to the precepts of that revelation which his Divine Master has left us, it was the removal of the political institution which went by the name of the Established Church of Ireland. What has followed? We have seen this—that that Church is endeavouring gradually, and, I trust, successfully, to purify itself for the work that is before it; and verily the fields are white unto the harvest, and I trust that within its folds the labourers may not be few.

And then we come to the last of those measures—the Irish Land Act. The result has been, as far as we know, that no landlord is injured, that the value of land has not fallen, that all property in Ireland is more secure, and that agrarian crime and outrage, as compared with a few years ago, have almost ceased.

There is one other interest, and it is evidently that which has been chiefly referred to in such sympathetic terms, that we are said to have harassed, that is the publican interest. Now, let it be borne in mind that the Licensing Act was not an Act of any particular party. It was incessantly urged upon the Government by gentlemen on the other side of the House, it was supported by gentlemen on the other side of the House, and it was a general Act of Parliament, in which no party triumphed over any other. But we must not forget that amongst the class of publicans there is what there is in almost every other class, I am sorry to say—that which I have termed a residuum. There are amongst the great body of the publicans some men who are low in circumstances and who are low in character, and to whom any legislation, however necessary, that tends to sobriety and good order must necessarily be somewhat hateful. There is a larger, a much larger class, I believe, to whom reasonable legislation in this direction is not only not hateful, but to some of them, I think, it must even be welcome. I do not believe that all the respectable publicans in this country, with their wives and families, wish that their houses should be kept open till

midnight. I believe that any measure, any reasonable measure, as reasonable men would judge in regard to this trade, if it were advantageous to the public at large, would be still more full of blessing to the families of the publicans themselves. But Parliament is not desirous, is not likely, nor is the Liberal party, nor is the present Government, to deal unjustly or harshly with any body of men; and I beg to express my opinion—the publicans may not take it to be worth much, but still I give it—that they are not wise, even for their own interests, if they should say to the great Liberal party, triumphing in the past, destined to triumph in the future, 'We deem you our natural enemy, and in all election contests you shall feel the strength of our resentment.'

I have shown you, I think, that if we have made disturbances, if we have made men anxious, if we have harassed class or trade, trades have not suffered, and the good of all the people has in reality been consulted. But what happens with this unhappy party when they are in and we are out? They came in in 1841, under Sir Robert Peel, with a majority of 90; and in 1846 they repealed the Corn Laws—not the whole party, but 100 of them, with Sir Robert Peel and his colleagues joining the Liberals, to do that great act of justice. They went into Parliament pledged to the lips to the maintenance of Protection. Those poor Fantees, about whom we are reading, who swear great oaths by the blue coat of General Macarthy, buttons and all—even they do not make more dreadful vows than did the Conservative members to support the Corn Laws for ever. And yet within five years under their great leader and accomplished and able statesman, now of historic greatness and renown, they were obliged to turn round and do the very thing which we advocated, and which they had almost sworn never to do. And then, in 1866—that is only the other day—you recollect what they did; they said that the bill introduced by Lord Russell and Mr. Gladstone for the extension of the borough

franchise to 7*l.*, and the lowering of the county franchise to 12*l.* or 14*l.*—I forget which—was a measure of a most desperate and democratic tendency, and that it would give to the working men the control over all the elections, and they would be masters of the Parliament. Well, having by these arguments and many others equally stupid—having destroyed the bill and got rid of the Government, they came into office, and in the very next year, in the very next session, whilst three-fourths of the House were gone to dinner, the leader of the House at that time, who now tells us we are harassing everybody, consented to the extension of the franchise to every householder in the boroughs, leading necessarily to the extension of the franchise to householders in the counties —and leading necessarily too to other things, some of which are dim and indistinct at present, and which I need not attempt to describe. If these men are in office you see what they do—if they are out of office they employ their time with unfriendly criticisms of what we do. And when we have done anything, the public generally find it so good that they never for a single moment dream of undoing it. Progress, therefore, in this country, with freedom of discussion and freedom of the press—progress is inevitable, and progress is disturbance. But the question is, if you go back to 1830, and review the period to 1874, what do you find, and what conclusion do you come to? It is a great misfortune that young men are often least acquainted with the history of our country which is nearest our own times. It is not written in the histories that were read at school, and most people are not old enough, as I am old enough, to remember almost every political fact since the great Reform Bill of 1832. I wish young men would read some history of this period. A neighbour and friend of mine, an intelligent and accomplished clergyman—Mr. Molesworth—has published a work, being a political history of England from the year 1830—that is, from the first Reform Bill, until

within the last two or three years—a book honestly written, in which facts are plainly and, I believe, truly stated, and a work which would give great information to all the young men of the country, if they could be prevailed upon to read it.

For the changes which have taken place the Liberal party is responsible; and if we have to bear the responsibility, if the changes are good, we shall have the credit and the glory. I would appeal to any man who is not incurably prejudiced or hopelessly ignorant as to this fact, whether England at this moment is not a country immeasurably better to live in than it was thirty or forty years ago. Look at her commerce and her industry; look at her wealth; look at the wages of her people; look at the progress of education; look at the greater security in the country; look at the comfort there is spread amongst the people, with largely diminished crime, and with largely diminished pauperism. And we must ascribe this in large measure to the course of policy which has been pursued by the Parliament, and which has been indicated and controlled mainly during the whole of that period by the Liberal party. Another question is—What is to be our policy now? You have determined what it shall be as far as you are concerned. For you have set the seal of your approval to the opinions and conduct of your representatives; they have come down to you again, and you have again expressed your approval and given your sanction to their conduct. We shall consent to, and we must endeavour to make such changes as the public interest and the public judgment require—not changes for the mere restless love of change, but changes which are indicated by reflection and experience. Our progress so far, I believe, has been in the highest sense of the word strictly and truly Conservative. Henceforth let us proceed upon the same rules, with the same wisdom, to equally beneficent ends. I have to thank you for this expression to me of the renewal

of your confidence. For some years I have done little but look on. There have been errors which I have disapproved and have condemned; but, if the Government has made errors —and no Government has lasted for five years that has not— I say that, looking on it with impartiality, its virtues amount to far greater measure than its errors.

It was my expectation within the last year that, when there came this dissolution—and it was not expected so soon —it was my expectation that I should have at that time to write, not an address offering myself as a candidate, but an address of farewell and final thanks. I did not think it was likely that I should ever again be able to take my place upon this platform to address you thus or to speak in the House of Commons. But I could not at this moment—it was impossible at this juncture that I could take any other course than that which I have taken in offering myself again to you, if you chose to elect me. And though I am not strong to labour as I have been in past years, yet still possibly I may do something to promote the great interests of our country and to guard the precious fruits of the many victories that we have won.

XV.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 25, 1875.

[On this day the three members for Birmingham made their customary appearance before their constituents. The meeting was to some extent disturbed by the anxiety which certain of the Temperance party felt, and which they sought to give effect to, by proposing a resolution that Mr. Muntz had caused distrust among his constituents by his attitude towards the Permissive Bill. The meeting however was indisposed to support the resolution.]

YET once again I must thank you for the kindness of your reception, and for the resolution which you have passed. I feel how little I deserve much of what has been said in my favour; but you know, as I know, that if I have in any degree neglected your interests and my duty, it has been from causes which were altogether beyond my control. At these, our annual gatherings, it has not been my custom to dwell much upon the past. I have been content to let the past speak for itself. What I have tried to do—what I have united in doing with other men—I believe, has generally been that which justified itself in the eyes and to the understanding of the great body of my countrymen. And now I shall not go much into the past, but shall ask you to come with me a little, while I look upon the present, and endeavour to peer somewhat into the future.

Since I was here last great changes have taken place—changes, not here, I am happy to say, but elsewhere—changes

under which the political power exercised in Parliament has been shifted from one side of the House to the other—changes under which a new set of occupants are found upon the Treasury Bench. It has been said very often within the last year that the people—not the people of Birmingham, but the people of the United Kingdom—were a little tired of legislation and of great measures, and that they preferred, at least for a time, to have rest and quiet. If too much has been done, and if nothing more was to be done, there has been a wonderful consistency in the action of the constituencies, because they have discovered twelve gentlemen whom they have placed on the Treasury Bench—whose special recommendation is that they never did anything—or at least that if they attempted to do anything, it was merely to prevent their opponents from doing something. When this new Government was formed, being somewhat of an old stager in Parliamentary matters, I was asked how I thought they were likely to get on; and I answered, with a simplicity which is commendable, that I thought they would get on for a good while pretty well if they would keep off politics. But let me remind you that in two Chambers and under one roof in Westminster there assemble about a thousand gentlemen, from all parts of the United Kingdom, whose special object in coming together is to talk politics. Therefore, it was not easy for the Government altogether to keep off politics; and, indeed, instead of doing that, or attempting to do it, we were surprised to find that they plunged almost at once into ecclesiastical affairs, the most exciting and explosive kind of political matter.

Last July I was spending some time in the extreme north, on the shores of the Pentland Frith. It was a much pleasanter atmosphere than that of the House of Commons. But I was obliged to pick up my information from the papers that came down twice, or at most three times, in the week. I pictured to myself what must be going on in Westminster, and it was a surprising picture. There was the Duke of Richmond—a

solemn Scotch proprietor, though not a Scotchman—a man, I should say, incapable of recklessness and of enthusiasm. There was the Lord Chancellor, with his wig on, and his wisdom under it, importing, as I thought, some Orange and North of Ireland notions into the affairs of the Established Church. I saw these two in one House, and the Prime Minister in another, engaged in applying a match to every bit of gunpowder they found in their way. First of all they dealt with the Church of Scotland. In the Church of Scotland there has been a thing which was called patronage—that is, the appointment of ministers in the Church rested mainly with the proprietors of the land. There was not much in it. It was of no money value. In Scotland there has been none of that remarkable corruption which has existed in connection with Church patronage in England. But then we must not forget what one of our poets has said of learning. He said—

> 'A little learning is a dangerous thing;
> Drink deep, or taste not.'

And so the little patronage of Scotland was found to be most dangerous, whilst the Committee of the House of Lords has recently decided that the enormous and corrupt patronage of the Church of England is a thing to be carefully guarded from destruction. What the Parliament did was this—to transfer the patronage in Scotland from the landed proprietors generally to the congregations. They thought it would prop up the Church, that it would add to its popularity—perhaps make it as popular as the Free Church; but they seemed to forget that it was necessary to place the reliance of the Church in the heart of the people, and by that means only could they make it really and permanently popular. Well, the Church appears, so far as I can gather, to be very much puzzled as to how to deal with its new powers; but the Free Churches of Scotland — the secessionists from the Scotch Church, the United Presbyterian and the Free Churches—have decided by a remarkably unanimous vote that the ecclesiastical affairs of

Scotland can never be placed on a satisfactory basis until the Established Church of Scotland is disestablished and set free. The result, then, of this is that the Government, by this measure, have raised something like a new and a great question in Scotland; they have stirred the fire which, in all probability, will no longer slumber; and there is every likelihood that, in the future elections for Scotland, the question of disestablishment will come up as a great and main question before almost every constituency in that kingdom.

But after dealing with the Scotch bill, there came the English bill, and the English bill was not a bill of the Government at all. It was introduced by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Now, the Archbishop of Canterbury is a very moderate man. Every Archbishop of Canterbury is a moderate man. No man who was not believed to be a moderate man would be elevated to that high office; but, as an old friend of mine once told me, he found the most reckless and dangerous things were often proposed and done by very moderate men. Well, the Archbishop brought his bill into the House. It was nourished and cherished by the Lord Chancellor and by Lord Shaftesbury. It was popular. It very soon passed the House of Lords. It came down to the House of Commons, and in the House of Commons it was found to be still more popular. Now, may I tell you a little of my experience about the House of Commons? I never knew a House of Commons unanimous and enthusiastic about a thing except at a time when it did not know what it was doing and where it was going. I have known it twice enthusiastic, and almost unanimous. Once, when Lord John Russell brought in his Bill on the subject of ecclesiastical titles amongst the Roman Catholics, the House was enthusiastic and almost unanimous. The Bill passed by enormous majorities. The Bill was of no use except to irritate and exasperate. It was many years afterwards repealed by a still more unanimous House, and everybody who agreed to pass it, I presume, now wishes the matter to be forgotten.

Another time when the House was enthusiastic and almost unanimous, was when it agreed to the declaration of war with the Russian Empire. I was in the House when that declaration of war was agreed to. I spoke against it and objected to it. Well, what has happened since? There was scarcely a newspaper at that time that did not treat me with scorn, and contempt, and insult, on account of the course I took. I suffered much from public obloquy, and yet now I believe there are very few men to be found who do not believe that the House of Commons was foolish, and did a very unpatriotic and evil thing. Well, but the Bill came down to the House of Commons—I mean the Archbishop's Bill. It was very popular. The Prime Minister was very glad to have anything in his hand that was popular. He tacked himself to the Archbishop's apron, and the Bill passed the House. Well, what is the charge of this Bill? And I ask you citizens of this great country, residents of this great city, surrounded as you are by circumstances in connection with this question, which demand your most serious consideration, what is it that this Bill charges? Why did it exist? It is brought as a charge against some thousands, I believe, of the clergy of the Church of England that their conduct is lawless, and that they require to be curbed. Now, who are these clergy? I am not going to make any ill-natured or unfair, indeed, I should say, any attack at all upon the Church, but I am asking you to consider the path on which you are invited to travel. Who are these persons? Some thousands of the clergy of the Church of England—men who know very little of the Dissenting ministers—say that differing from Dissenting ministers, they are gentlemen. They say they are the sons of gentlemen; that they have had the advantage of being educated at our ancient universities; that there they have been accustomed to associate with the great wealth and the high blood of the peerage. And they tell us that they are set over us by the State as instructors in morals and religion. And yet their own friends

—the archbishops and bishops and ministers of State—declare that their conduct is so lawless that it is necessary to have special legislation to keep them in order. There was a very dear old friend of mine, the late Colonel Perronet Thompson, who once said to me when there had been some talk somewhere of a revolt of troops, that it is a very dangerous thing when the extinguisher takes fire. He thought there was not much chance of the conflagration being put out. The Bill, then, undertook to prove that our State instructors in morals and religion had got into this condition of lawlessness that they required special legislation to curb them. Things, then, are come to a serious pass, and it behoves all men and all women who think upon public questions at all to consider the position in which we are now placed. We know there are special cases in which there is special legislation. There is special legislation with regard to publicans. They sell articles which promote unfortunately disorder and crime, and even madness, and special legislation is necessary; there is special legislation for some other businesses—marine-store dealers for one. Some years ago there was special legislation for a small and brutal class of men who went by the name of garotters. It is said now that there will be some special legislation for persons who commit crimes of violence, and particularly for men who are so extraordinarily savage as to beat their wives. Well, all this may be necessary—I do not argue whether it is or not, but there is something far more dreadful than this, and that is when you find men—thousands of them—upon whose consecrated heads the hands of the bishop have been placed, for whom it is necessary to have special legislation to punish or to curb them.

Now in a great body like the Church of England there will always be—there must always be—some considerable divergence of opinion; and it is on account of this divergence that the Government have assisted to carry a new Act of Uniformity. Just over two hundred years ago, there was a

great and celebrated Act passed, which has gone by the name of the Act of Uniformity. Under it at least two thousand men—the bulk of the learned and pious clergymen of the Church of England, were ejected from that church. It was a most blessed secession for the country, because no doubt it laid the foundation of a party which has ever since in England been the consistent friend of freedom and improvement in our legislation. Under that Act the persons who were ejected were those who were furthest from Rome. Under the Act passed last Session, the persons who are to be restrained and if possible retained, are those against whom it is charged—that they are nearest and continually going nearer to Rome. Now, there is a great disappointment—there must be to every thoughtful and true man and woman in the Church of England, and to many outside her, with this state of things—because you know, all of you who have been accustomed to read matters of this kind, you know quite well that one of the great arguments in favour of the Established Church is that it represses all zeal which tends to disorder—and not only represses zeal, but that it is a bulwark against that church from which our fathers separated themselves three hundred years ago. They say that what the Church of England wants is not zeal, but a gentlemanly conformity to it; and they are very angry now that, somehow or other, this zeal is creeping into the Church. Well, it crept into the Scotch Church about thirty years ago. At that time the fermentation was so violent that the hoops of the hogshead gave way, and the staves tumbled together, and there was an immeasurable quantity of sound ecclesiastical liquor lost. The very same thing is now happening, to a certain extent, in the Church of England. I do not say whether the zeal is wise or not—there is very much zeal that is unwise, and there is not very much which is wise at all times. I do not say whether it is wise, but I say that it is earnest, and conscientious, and probably it is dangerous—but not so dangerous, perhaps, to the truth as

to the political associations connected with it. Again, it is said, and very fairly, and I do not object to those who say it, that the Church of this country is a State Church—an Act of Parliament Church, that, in point of fact, it is not only a religious, but a political institution; that it is as it has been described by a member of the House of Peers of my acquaintance, as a branch of the civil service, and that it must therefore obey rules.

If you want to hear about the very last utterance upon that point—I mean about the obedience of the church—I will read a few lines from the speech of a learned friend of mine, delivered only the other day in the city of Oxford—the Solicitor-General to the late Government. He was very strong last year for this Bill, and he is strong, I suppose, or will be, for succeeding measures following in its track. He says that if one set of priests—now listen to this—you know I am a Nonconformist, and I endeavour to speak gently of a matter of this kind, but Sir William Harcourt said this:—

'That if one set of priests refused to conform, we shall find others, as we have found before, who will obey the national faith.'

Now, he does not say who will obey their consciences, or who will obey the law of God, as they read it, but who will obey the national faith. Some years ago I recollect a somewhat irreverent wag suggesting, as a matter of economy, that when our judges were too old to continue their duties as judges effectively, they should be translated to the bench of bishops. He argued that by doing so you would save the pensions of the judges, and you would place a very large amount of practical wisdom upon the bench of bishops. I should not suggest anything of that kind, but my learned friend the member for Oxford says we can have others who will conform to the national faith; we can turn out any of those men who do not conform, and we can put others in their places. I doubt if he will find it very easy to procure

pious and earnest and learned men to take these offices on the kind of terms which he offers in this language which I have quoted. I think he must have forgotten somewhat the rock from which he was hewn, and he must be thinking more of the profession to which he is now attached. No doubt the members of that profession take either side of the case. The brief comes from the plaintiff, or from the defendant, and probably is equally welcome; the fee comes from this side or from that, and it adds to the emoluments of their professional services. And he may have thought the positions in the Church—the position the most elevated and the most sacred to which man can be called—that a position of this kind can be taken by men, and numbers of men, without caring in the least what it is that their conscience teaches or what they believe to be truth, but that merely for so many hundreds a year they will willingly accept this office, and conform to what he calls the national faith.

It is quite true that the Government does order, and can order, what shall be the uniform of the truth. It can determine—all your corporations can determine, everything about the helmet hats and the truncheons of the police, and there is no doubt whatever that as far as the dress and ceremonies and position of the clergy go, it is in the power of Parliament to make stringent laws, and to enforce conformity to the rules which it shall lay down. But then, as you all know, by these Acts of Parliament you cannot touch the hearts and reason and consciences of men. The pulpits are free everywhere. Your prayers are written and printed and fixed, but the sermons are left to the judgment and conscience of the preacher; and you may rely upon it, that amongst the vast number of the clergy of the Church of England any attempt to bind them down in a sort of straight-waistcoat of this kind, though it may appear to have a temporary success, must ultimately and wholly fail. It is said that there are about 20,000 ministers in the Church of England, and if

half the population in England and Wales are connected by association and by affection with that Church, there are 10,000,000 of persons connected with it. Now, if it is to be said that within the borders of the Church no latitude is to be allowed—that any freedom of opinion and practice is to be permitted outside only, then I venture to say that the days of the Establishment are numbered. You may rely upon it that zeal will not for all time sacrifice freedom, even to keep the emoluments and dignities of a State Church.

I am not defending the new manners, and the new practices, and the new opinions. I have no sympathy with them whatsoever. I could dispense with some things that I think are superstitious in the Church, even upon the view of the evangelical party; and therefore I should be the very last man to add anything to them, but I am endeavouring to show you that the course which the Government has entered upon, and in which Parliament, accepting their invitation, has followed them last year, is a perilous course, and it is worth while for the people of England—the religious people of England—the people inside the Church quite as much as those outside, to consider the matter very seriously, and to ask themselves whether this vast question can any longer be committed to the care, and disposal, and management, and speeches, and votes, of the two Houses of Parliament.

But there are other symptoms which are troublesome, and are even perilous, if they are not actually hopeless and fatal. Now, shall I mention two or three recent incidents which have struck me very forcibly in connection with this question? You recollect that a short while ago a bishop made an exhibition of himself, not favourable, as I should say, in connection with the question whether a respectable and worthy Wesleyan minister should have his name on a tombstone with the word 'reverend' before it. I told you that I do not speak strongly, and I hope I never speak evil of dignities—but my learned friend Sir William Harcourt, in

his public speech, alluding I suppose to this bishop, speaks of him as a learned simpleton. Now, I would not use such language; I think what the bishop did, appears to be almost naturally the outcome of his position and of the pretensions of his order. He calls himself, or allows himself to be called, a right reverend father, and yet, as for this Wesleyan minister, though he assumes to be called so, he shall not have the word 'reverend' prefixed to his name on any tombstone in any churchyard over which he has control. You read now and then some of those beautiful epistles that are found in the New Testament. You will find that St. Peter in speaking of St. Paul speaks of him as our beloved brother Paul. He never once, to my knowledge, uses the term 'right reverend father.' Now, if the bishops—if this very bishop, who, being learned, must know something, we may hope, of the epistles, if he were moved by the same spirit by which Peter and Paul were moved, is it not reasonable to think that he would at least not object to give to this Wesleyan minister any title which he thought it proper to assume for himself? But I take this to be the case—I believe no harm of the bishop, I know nothing of him—bishops are generally, so far as I believe, excellent men, and are generally anxious to do their duty in the best way that is open to them—but it is an instance of that kind of arrogance which comes from the sacerdotal spirit within the Church. It is a form of presumption which is born of privilege, that which does not come from the pride of man, or from his dislike to his fellow-man, but from the unfortunate circumstances in which he is placed, and which breathe into him a mind and spirit, so far as I can judge, which is wholly contrary to the mind and spirit that was in the Apostle from whom I quoted. It is not to be wondered at, when, as one of your poets says, your priests assume to be 'sole vendors of the law that works salvation,'—it is not to be wondered at that with these privileges, with these endowments, these preferments, this

constantly proclaimed superiority—it is not unreasonable to expect that such things as this should happen, and that they should despise men—humble and hard-working men—whose labours have been abundantly blessed by Heaven, but who seem to intrude into their privileged field.

Now, let us for one moment just survey this privileged field. Is there order there, or is there confusion? If it be wrong to find such fault with those outside, might it not be well and wise to try to arrest the mischief which is so obviously spreading inside? I have shown you, and I take it for granted that it may be assumed there is a widespread strife between the clergy and the congregations, or else there would be no pretence or necessity for the Bill of last year. But there is also strife between the clergy and the bishops, and there is great discord between the bishops themselves. You have heard lately that a bishop, a man of eminence and learning, has been in this country, from a far country, on a message of justice and mercy, a message which I hope has not been without its effect, for I trust that the statements which are made of the manner in which he has been received, and his case has been listened to, by Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, are not at all exaggerated. Well, this bishop comes to this country, and he is invited by a clergyman of the famous city which my learned friend represents—he is invited to preach; but the bishop of that diocese immediately issues an order that the colonial bishop shall not preach in the church. What does the clergyman do? In perfect order, apparently, he submits at once, and the colonial bishop is not admitted to his pulpit; but the colonial bishop hands the sermon he was about to preach to the clergyman, and the clergyman reads from his pulpit the very sermon which the colonial bishop would have preached, had he been allowed to do so. Then another bishop forbids him in another diocese, a metropolitan diocese, to preach there; and what immediately follows? I suppose the best known and

the most eminent clergymen of that diocese, though not under the jurisdiction of the bishop, as it happens—though still within, as I call it, the geographical limits of that diocese—invites this very excluded colonial bishop to preach in the Abbey of Westminster; but the bishop, not wishing to promote disorder, declines the invitation, and therefore he does not preach. I am told that another bishop has signified his willingness that, if he chooses he can preach in his diocese. You see brought to view the painful arrogance with which one bishop treats the pretensions of a Wesleyan minister. You see at the same time the sort of charity there exists between some of the bishops of this country and the bishop from Natal. You have at the same time an instance of the order which prevails when a minister accepts the mandate of the bishop, which excludes a colonial bishop from a pulpit, but escapes from it in reality by reading the colonial bishop's sermon, and the sort of uniformity which there is in the Church of England, when the Bishop of London will not allow the Bishop of Natal to preach in his diocese, and the next great man in the diocese invites him to preach there.

These grievances appear to have suggested the Bill of last year. Sir W. Harcourt, in his speech at Oxford, says that legislation of this kind should only be resorted to in a case of necessity. He says, 'I am satisfied there is such a necessity.' 'In my opinion, the present condition of things in the Church is simply intolerable.' He says, 'The remedy may prove severe, but the disease is critical. I believe a capital operation is necessary to extirpate the cancer, and if we do not do it the patient will surely die.' I suppose, therefore, that it is within the view of Sir W. Harcourt, and those who go with him, to proceed with further legislation in the same direction. The Public Worship Bill of last session is mere trifling. It makes no alteration in the law. It simply provides a new Court, to which the parishioners from

all parishes in England may go and lay complaints against the Ministers. But it does not decide what is the law. It leaves that to the judge who is or is soon to be appointed. And it can deal only with vestments and millinery, with positions and with ceremonies. It cannot touch the sermons. It may deal with the question of the light that comes from the candles, but it cannot deal with the question of the light which comes from the eloquence, the earnestness, and power, and Godly sincerity of the man who preaches. Thus we are brought face to face with this great fact, the fact which I wish you to consider, and that is that the State Church, as we have it now, is not and cannot be in harmony with the age. I should like to ask you what there is that was established in the reign of Queen Elizabeth that is in harmony with the reign of Queen Victoria? The difference between the times of the two Queens is enormous, and cannot be measured. The arbitrariness, the absolute power, and the insulting assertion of it, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, cannot be in harmony with the moderation, the justice, the kindness, and the sympathy which you have in the Queen of our own day. But take the House of Commons of that day, and this day, the difference cannot be calculated, cannot be measured.

I was reading only a day or two ago, a remarkable book published lately, by an old friend of mine, Mr. Lindsay, who was for many years in Parliament, and who in bad health out of Parliament has employed himself in writing a history of the merchant shipping and commerce of past ages. I was reading a description of what took place in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. More than one-half of the shipowners and especially those on the Southern coasts, were engaged in piracy, and their ships were pirates or corsairs, for I scarcely know the difference between them. In point of fact, it is a most extraordinary thing in our history for the last 300 years, that a Church that was established in an age like that should have been able in any way to continue itself in its

ancient form until the time in which we live. But the Church, whether we consider it as a political institution, or a religious institution, is greatly out of harmony with the times. I will not complain, though I might complain, and it is a strong argument in the case, that wherever you find the Church of England powerful, there you find opposition to any legislative or administrative reform most powerful also. In our political life, we have received no service from the Church of England as a body. There have been occasional, remarkable, and admirable exceptions, but from the body of it we have received no service on all the great measures of improvement which have so blessed this country during the last half century. But if you look at it as a religious institution, what do you find? You find at one end of it that its payments, its salaries, are excessive and enormous. You find at the other end of it that they are scanty and inadequate, and altogether a disgrace to a great national institution. You find further, that, contrary to what exists in any other Government department, there is no such thing known in it as promotion by merit. Promotion in the Church is promotion through interest and through importunity. A friend of mine not long ago—understand me, I am only now speaking on behalf of numerous curates. I am not making a claim on behalf of Nonconformists—the Methodist minister does not trouble himself about that—I am only speaking with a voice which will find an answer to-morrow in the hearts of very many curates. A few years ago, within the last ten years, a friend of mine had occasion to apply to the Lord Chancellor of the time with the object of obtaining some small preferment for a devoted and excellent minister, whose circumstances were to the last degree urgent and pressing; and the Lord Chancellor told him, as I understood—or his patronage secretary, it might be—told him that he had on his list about 700 names of curates and clergymen—that is, ordained ministers—of the Church of England, asking

that they should have something from his, as they believed, inexhaustible stores of patronage; and that all those men believed their case to be as hard and their claim as strong as the case and the claim of the poor minister for whom my friend interceded. But further. Need I tell you what I presume most of you must know, that half of the livings of the Church of England are private property, and that they may be and are often bought and sold in the open or the secret market? We sell cotton on the Exchange at Liverpool, you sell metals on the Exchange at Birmingham; but all over the country there is going on from day to day a traffic in the most sacred and the most solemn office in the Church of England. And, further, the clergy—and I think this will be found the great difficulty—the clergy themselves, when appointed, are freeholders and immovable. Unless these be involved in some great scandal, there is scarcely any neglect or any betrayal of duty which either the law or the congregation can touch; and notwithstanding all these evils, and I should say that they are evils, and I should say it with a stronger voice, and in a more resolute tone, if I were a member of the Church—all these evils, great as they are, have not been sufficient to quench zeal in this Church, and at this moment, and more now than in any former time, there are thousands of honest and conscientious men, whose labours and whose sacrifices can never be estimated, and never compensated in this life.

But then the great complaint is that the zeal, which is not denied, is running in the wrong direction, that it is carrying the clergy and some of their more simple-minded followers in the direction of Rome, and we have a sort of feeling that there is a great danger to the Church, and the archbishops and bishops are stumping their dioceses in defence of the Establishment. I saw, only the other day, that the Archbishop of Canterbury, in a speech which was admirable in tone—a speech which no one could read without

interest and pleasure—warned everybody who was at all doubtful as to the wisdom of maintaining the establishment, as to what would happen if the establishment was not maintained. They always point to that very old man, or to his successor, who lives in the city of Rome. In fact, Sir William Harcourt says, 'I am of opinion that a Protestant establishment is the only power that can effectually cope with the organised forces of Rome.' He says, 'compared with its powers of resistance I believe that the efforts of the voluntary bodies are feeble,' and he says further, 'he must be a purblind politician who does not understand that the residuary legatee of disestablishment would infallibly be the Church of Rome.' Well, but then, unfortunately, we are in this position, that the fort which was intended to protect and defend us has turned its guns against us. But Sir William Harcourt says, in answer to that, 'O, yes, you may change the garrison, but do not blow up the fort.' But the fact is the garrison and the fort are one and inseparable, and unless he can get rid of some thousands of the clergy, and put in their places some thousands of his friends the facile and changeable lawyers, I know not how we can have a fort or defenders upon whom we can rely. Let me ask you now, and there will be persons in this meeting—I hope there are some—who may question very much the force of what I am saying; but I ask them to look round. Take the Presbyterian bodies in Scotland or England; take the Wesleyans, take the Independents, take the Baptists, take any of the smaller sects, of whom I need not in this enumeration make account—do you find that the ministers of these various bodies are constantly, in their ceremonies, in their decorations, in their postures, in their sermons, in their confessions, in their exhortations to their people—do you find that they are gradually, or obviously, or rapidly going over to Rome? I have read, I always read with great interest some of the transactions of the Wesleyan Conferences, some of the transactions of the Congregational Union, and of the great

meetings of the Baptists; but I never find in their speeches, or in their reports or documents, an incessant complaint that a certain percentage of their ministers and people are constantly going over to Rome. It is only from the hierarchical and prelatic church that there are converts made continually to the Church of Rome; and more, it may be said, and, I say it without hesitation, that the Parliament is helpless in the matter at present, and the people also are nearly helpless, and I believe that the State bonds in which the Church is bound cause the mischief, and at the same time cause the helplessness that we have complained of.

A little more on this subject, and I will not trouble you very long. The other day there was a meeting held in this town, over which Lord Dartmouth presided—a meeting for the defence of the Church. I have no objection at all that those who love the Church should stand up in its defence, but I think they should be a little better tempered towards some of us who take different views. The Church, according to their own showing, is a great national institution. We are not an inconsiderable portion of the nation. We have a right to fairly discuss it. We have no intention of doing anything by violence. Our position is that all thoughtful people should consider this subject. If they believe the Church is not carrying them in the direction of Rome; if they believe it is a sound Protestant institution; if they believe it makes the people religious—well, then, let them preserve the Church; but if they come to a different conclusion, surely the people and the Parliament are at liberty to make whatever change they think proper. This Church Defence Association reminds me of another meeting held the other day, with which Birmingham was connected. There was a meeting of the licensed victuallers in Salford, and a Birmingham man an old friend of mine, if I may say so, because I have often had the pleasure of seeing him on deputations, I mean, Mr. Wadhams—was the chairman of that meeting. But I find

that Mr. Wadhams and his friends take exactly the same sort of course that Lord Dartmouth and his friends take. They are very petulant, they are bad tempered, and they are apt to call names. They say that the temperance people want to ruin all the publicans, and it is a dreadful thing that some should propose—which is, perhaps, the next probable assault—that public-houses should be shut up on Sunday. Surely, every sensible man knows, and a great number of publicans know, that the persons in England who would be most benefitted by the closing of public-houses on Sunday are the publicans and their families. These two bodies—Lord Dartmouth and his friends here, and Mr. Wadhams and his friends, are in possession each of them of a monopoly—the one teaches morals and religion about which they cannot agree; and in the other you have the undisputed, and the almost uncontrolled, right to dispense to the people as much as they like of those articles which I have described before, as promoting disorder, and crime, and madness to a very great extent. I am not assailing the Church; I admit much that may be said in its favour; I have admitted, and I assert, that there are thousands of excellent men who are at work in the various parishes in England as ministers of the Church; but then there would be thousands of excellent men if it was not an Act of Parliament Church, and I believe that every one of those good men would do just as much good if he was a clergyman of a free church as he can possibly do in his present position of being connected with the State. I do not recommend this meeting, or any constituency, that they should pledge their candidates to vote for the abolition of the Established Church. I do not in the least degree recommend or approve of any body of men who complain that a Parliamentary or party leader is chosen who has not formed the same opinion that I have upon this question. This is a question which has not come near the front yet. It is one of the gravest questions which a people has ever had to consider. It is far more important and far more difficult than

the question of the extension of the suffrage or even of the redistribution of seats. It is a question that goes down deep into the hearts of hundreds of thousands of good men and women in this country, and you cannot by a sudden wrench make a great alteration of this kind. What you have to do is to discuss it, like intelligent and Christian men, with fairness to the Church, with fairness to its ministers, with the sole object of doing what you believe to be good to your country and to the religion which the country professes.

I have said nothing to-night about a point to which our chairman referred—the condition of the Liberal party. I have found, in my more than thirty years' experience, that a political party somehow or other gathers itself up when it is wanted, and by the time that it is wanted. And, therefore, I shall not go into a discussion of the present position of the Liberal party—conscious as I am that at least we of that party have succeeded so far in implanting the living seeds of a wise and just policy in the minds of the people of England, that I believe there is no other party in the country who can uproot that work which we have done. I have said nothing, and it is not my intention to say more than one sentence with regard to a fact which startled and pained many throughout the kingdom during the last two or three weeks. I refer to the abandonment by Mr. Gladstone of the leadership of the Liberal party. They who have seen him for very many years in the House of Commons as I have—they who have sat with him, and seen him in the counsels of the Cabinet—they only are able justly to estimate the magnitude of the loss which the House of Commons and the country have sustained by his withdrawal. I will say nothing in answer to ungenerous things that have been said of him. Of this I am well aware, that Mr. Gladstone, like an old and a noble Roman, can be content with deserving the praises of his country, even though some of his countrymen should deny them to him. In conclusion, then, I am not

asking you or your constituencies, or any party, or section of a party, to plunge into a violent agitation for the overthrow of the Established Church of England. I think it would be a great calamity indeed that a change like that should come through violent hatred and angry discussion, that it should be accomplished by a tempest which would be nothing but the turmoil of a great revolution. I ask you only to consider it, and I appeal not to you who may be Nonconformists, or who may not care about the Church, but I appeal to those who do care about it, who do care as they say they do for Protestantism and religion. I have offered to you to-night my humble contribution to the discussion of the greatest question of our time. If I am able to form any just judgment upon it, I should say that it will be a great day for freedom in this country, and for Protestantism and Christianity, when we shall witness the full enfranchisement of the Church within the realm of England.

XVI.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 28, 1875.

[On this day the Birmingham Liberal Association gave a conversazione in the Town Hall to the four hundred who constituted the working committee of of the Association, and to others. Mr. Bright took occasion to comment on some of the causes which in his judgment brought about the reverses of 1874.]

On Monday evening last I was permitted to address a meeting almost unequalled in its numbers and importance. On that occasion I called your attention to what seemed to me a great, indeed a solemn subject. To-night we are met in greatly diminished numbers, but if we consider that the 400 to whom reference has been made are the popularly elected representatives of the great majority of the 60,000 electors of Birmingham, I am not sure that this meeting is not equal in importance to that which was held on Monday last.

The report which has just been read by Mr. Baker does not furnish to strangers all the information which you have to give. He thought it was not necessary to teach you the exact constitution of your own body. With your permission I should like to state two or three facts to you about it. Inasmuch as the gentlemen with ready pens, around me and below me, in all probability will convey what I have to say to all parts

of the country, I asked my friend Mr. Harris to supply me with the facts connected with this association, and he tells me that the borough is divided into, I think, sixteen wards, that every ward elects its share of the general association, and that at an open meeting, held every year, each ward chooses twenty-four of its most trusted Liberals to join the association's executive committee; that the sixteen wards, with the twenty-four members each, come together to 384 members, and that four of the executive committee for each ward amount altogether to sixty-four. Then, at the first meeting of the committee of the association four officers are chosen, who, I presume, are chairman, deputy-chairman, treasurer, and secretary. Then, also at the first meeting of the general association executive committee, the committee has the power of adding thirty to the number of those previously elected. The object of this is that they should be able to select from all over the town persons who are likely to be efficient, and of great value to the committee, but who, from not taking a very active part in the municipal affairs of each ward, may possibly be overlooked by the elected body of that year. The committee altogether comes to the number of 473, but there is something easier to speak and pleasanter to hear in giving round numbers, and, therefore, they speak of this remarkable association as the Liberal Association of 'the Four Hundred.' To the 400 is left the selection of candidates and the decision of all great questions of policy, and, on appeal, of questions affecting the association. The executive consists of four from each ward—that is, sixty-four members, four officers, and the twenty who may be elected by the committee itself, making altogether eighty-eight—and the executive transact the business of meetings and elections, and take the conduct of the ordinary affairs of the association, carrying out the policy decided upon by the 400.

Now, it is obvious to everybody that an association like

this, elected so fairly and openly on such a popular basis, and coming up every year from the constituency of the different wards, must be an association of the most powerful character. It is perfect as a representation of the whole community of the town—that is, of the Liberal party; and if its members are loyal to each other, and loyal to their principles, it seems impossible that such an association should fail of success in its great efforts. Mr. Muntz, Mr. Dixon, and myself were at one time three of the candidates to whom this association gave its confidence, and through their activity, and the loyalty of the great body of the electors, we became not candidates only but your representatives. You have looked over such faults as we have committed, and you have looked favourably on such merits as we may be supposed to possess. As for myself you have borne with much absence on my part, and I may say we are all grateful for your kindness and for the remarkable confidence which you have placed in us.

Now the results of this organisation have been explained in the report read by Mr. Baker. Everything that is of a public character is political in Birmingham. Your municipality encloses within itself the great spirit of the Liberal party in the town. In your School Board elections you have had a signal and memorable triumph; and I venture to say that when two or three years more shall have passed, and when the work of your School Board has been observed, that whether it may be criticised by friendly or unfriendly men, it will be found that it has loyally done a great and signal service to your community. It is a blessing to think, then, that in all your municipal affairs, in your school board affairs, and in your parliamentary representation, there is a grand symmetry and consistency which is a great credit to your community. But elsewhere, as Mr. Wright has said, things have been different. There have been causes of this defeat for which many persons demand an explanation. I

will not try to state all of them, but I will refer, at least, to three, and that very briefly. A question about which so much has been said—the question of legislation in regard to public houses—no doubt has had a very serious influence. The publicans are, as you know, in the possession of a privilege conferred upon them by the Government, through the magistrates. They have been the most prosperous class, if you reckon their capital and their labour—undoubtedly the most prosperous class in the country during the last three or four years. I believe there is no ordinary property in the country which has increased so much in value as the property in public houses. And yet, notwithstanding this, there has been a combination which I hardly like to describe as I feel about it—a combination of the closest character, for the purpose of sacrificing every public question and every honourable consideration of the public good to a low and sordid interest (because in the midst of their prosperity there was no injury done to them practically by any legislation)—to the low and sordid interest of the worst class of publicans in the country. And when I say of the worst class, understand what I mean. Amongst the many thousands of publicans there are a great number of respectable and honourable men; and perhaps many more than are supposed to be by those who sometimes too fiercely assail them. But there is another and lower class of whom one can scarcely say this, and I am afraid that as in many other things so in this combination of the publicans against the public interest, the head of the great body is moved, and moved unfortunately by the tail.

It is easy to see how the publicans influence an election. The publican has his own vote, and he has a number of persons not remarkable for sobriety—many of them not remarkable for their intelligence or their anxiety to promote the public interest, who frequent his bar parlour and spend their evenings round his comfortable fire. With these it is easy—

and no doubt this has been done to a great extent—to set influences at work on behalf of the objects of the publican. There are abundant cases in which that which, in a more open manner, might be called a bribe may be given, and the publican not only brings his own vote to the poll, but might bring three, or six, or in some cases a dozen, to give their votes with him, and with him, as I believe, and as he would believe if he did not put his own interest against it, in opposition to the true interests of the country. I do not know how many—nobody knows how many—Parliamentary votes have been affected by this; but I have no doubt that a very considerable proportion of the majority obtained by the present Government was directly obtained from that cause.

Then I come to another cause of defeat, which is one of a wholly different character, and that is the divisions which existed—the absolutely childish policy that was pursued in many parts of the country, in many constituencies, by sections or fragments of the Liberal party. Half-a-dozen men, or a dozen, or twenty, or fifty, are possessed, not of one idea, but by one idea. It may be a very good object that they wish for. There is no end of the good objects which people wish for that cannot be accomplished by the agitations and contention of a year; but these men come into a constituency, and argue in this way: 'We will force the candidate—he may not be of our opinion, he may be as conscientious as we are, and he has his opinion—but we will force the candidate to this particular vote, although the constituency have never expressed their opinion in its favour, but, nevertheless, he shall vote with us, or we (this little section) will oppose him; and we will oppose him though our opposition be fatal, not to him only, but fatal to the party with which we have always been associated, or hurtful to interests in the country, which may be a thousand times greater than the ideas by which we are possessed, or even fatal to the object we have

before us.' I will take the temperance men, and a variety of other persons who in some places have acted in this way. I do not want to stir up irritating matters more than is absolutely necessary, but I say that such men are not qualified to take any wise part in politics. If the making defeat absolutely certain were able to forward their views, and to make them triumph it would be some consolation; but the silliness of believing that it can forward their cause is even greater than the silliness of the mode by which they attempt to do it. I know perfectly well, from being in the House of Commons all these years, what is the sort of thing that members say, and what they do with regard to questions of this nature. They never carry them to success. I know no question in my time that has been carried by any such tactics, and so long as men are resolute and firm and honourable, and have any sort of independence, you may rely upon it that no such measure will ever be carried by these tactics. If you look over the boroughs of the country at the last election, you will find that at least a dozen of them, possessing twenty-four or twenty-five votes, were lost by the mode of conduct which I have been exposing and condemning; and if you suppose that the publicans, with a want of patriotism shocking to think of, were the cause of losing an equal number of votes, you will find whence comes nearly the whole of the majority of the present Government.

Then there is another great cause, as I think, of loss. In 1868 the elections went with a great sweep all over the country in favour of a Liberal policy and of the Liberal party. The new franchise had come into operation for the first time, and the elections were so decided and so decisive that it was common to hear men say, 'The Tories are done for ever; here is a majority of a hundred or more. The matter is so much decided now that really after all we need have no apprehension again that the Liberal party will ever

be in jeopardy.' They forgot then, and they forget now, what are the permanent conditions, at least for the present and for some time to come, of politics in this country. They forget the solid power that is always opposed to the Liberal party and to Liberal principles. They forget that almost all the land of the country is in the hands of persons whose interests are different from ours. They forgot that the Church, which is established, as you know, in every parish is nearly always on the side of the Tory party; and that wherever a new church is built, be it in town or be it in country, be it in any county in England or Wales, you will find that that church is not a centre of political light, but of political darkness, and that from it there comes no trace of anything that is found to be Liberal in representation or Parliamentary action, but entirely the contrary; and the Church is now as certain to be the centre of the propagation of Tory principles as the public-house itself.

In addition to this, you have another cause (which I am not about to complain of, because I believe it is in the nature of things), that is, that some men become rich, and many of them become what is called very comfortably off, and generally the more wealthy a man is, with a balance at his bankers and investments everywhere, the more timid he becomes in all his political actions. Well, then, with this timidity on high, and unhappily profound ignorance below, you may fancy to a certain extent what a vast amount of solid resistance there is to any proposition for any political progress; and then you should add to all this that which I must mention, though one likes not to treat of it, the enormous lying in which our opponents from top to bottom of their organisation, throughout their political speeches, and throughout their press, indulged against Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues during the whole time that they were in office. Depend upon it the time has not come in this country yet when reformers can afford to rest on their oars. I recollect

in a beautiful poem of a very distinguished American, Mr. Bryant, in an address to Liberty, he says, 'Thou must never rest for thine enemy never sleeps;' and that is the state of things here as it is in other parts of the world, and to all Liberal men it ought to come home as a solemn duty, that if there be questions which they believe require to be settled in the interests of the great mass of their countrymen, they ought to stand fast to their colours. They ought to march together; they ought to keep themselves wide awake, and to urge on the course which they believe to be essential to the welfare of the nation.

I believe that Birmingham is more intelligent, better informed, and more mentally alive on political questions than any other of the great towns of the kingdom. Its political education began in the days of Dr. Priestly, it advanced greatly during the agitation for the first Reform Bill, and I would hope that during the last twenty years, in the constant discussions we have had, and in some of which I have been permitted to partake, the political activity and the intelligence of the borough have not declined. A superior organisation added to all that, does everything, and if the boroughs throughout the country in proportion to their size would adopt the organisation which you have here, my honest belief is that it would take a very short time indeed to recover throughout the boroughs the losses that were sustained at the last election.

There is just one other point on which I must say a sentence or two. I observed that at a meeting in Liverpool the other day, some men who appear before the public as, and perhaps are, working men, advocated the notion that it is very important to have what they call labour representatives in Parliament. If I am not mistaken—I am sorry I have not the resolutions and the report of the meeting here—but if I am not mistaken it was insisted upon that a course of division, if necessary, should be forced upon the con-

stituencies, with the view of in fact disarranging the party, unless what was called the working-class representative could be returned. Now working men are like other men, and in this respect men are very much like women. Every class seems to be the prey of some delusion, or some false cry; and it is attempted to be shewn to working men that if they can take out some man of their own, who has stood at the lathe or dug in the mine, or who has handled the trowel, and put him into Parliament, there is some special advantage to be gained by working men. But if we were to have a Parliament composed of two classes—one working-men representatives and one that are not representatives of working men, it appears to me it would be one of the greatest calamities that could happen in our representative system. If you can find a man, let him be a first or second-class or third-class passenger, possessed of intelligence and honesty and firmness, and the kind of capacity which is required for discharging parliamentary duties, then I say lay hold of him at once and make him a member of Parliament. But as to this new principle, I understand that some working men say they do not quite comprehend it, and they fear that the main object of this new doctrine is that a few men who are anxious to get into Parliament may get there upon it. I will not say whether this is true or not. Many things that I disapprove of are held and preached perfectly honestly, and this project may be so too; but, honestly or dishonestly, I believe it to be a principle which is contrary to the true interests of the country, and to the opinions of the wisest and best men in it. What have we been doing for all these years? What have we asked you to help us to do from this platform over and over again? Surely, to work with us in order that we might mould a nation out of classes. I think that was a wise thing to do, and much more patriotic than to endeavour to separate a nation into a variety of sections, every one jealous of every other.

In our own time what has been done, and who has done it? Take the first Reform Bill. I will speak of a man who is still living, aged and venerable, though retired from active political life. I mean Lord Russell. When neither middle class nor working class men sent even a petition to Parliament for years, Lord John Russell, over and over again, brought the question of reform before the unreformed and corrupt Parliament, and kept it as well as he could before the Parliament and the people. Take the case of Mr. Gladstone. There is not time in this meeting, if I were to attempt it, to sum up his magnificent labours on behalf of the working classes, more directly than of all other classes, from the time when he brought in his first budget until the time when he completed, so far as he was permitted to complete it, his great legislation for Ireland. Take the late Mr. Hume. Joseph Hume was one of the most honourable, industrious, and devoted men who ever sat in the English House of Commons. For nearly forty years, I suppose, he devoted himself, night after night, to promoting economy and the saving of taxes. He kept one, two, three, or four private secretaries at a time, and it is impossible to describe the amount of labour, far beyond that of the hardest working man in any trade or profession, which he endured in order that he might get together all the facts which were necessary to prove his case and to save public money, which he thought was being too lavishly expended by the Government of the day. Then my old friend Mr. Charles Villiers, the member for Wolverhampton, a constituency which he has so well served, and which has given him such continuous confidence—Mr. Charles Villiers and my dear and lamented friend Richard Cobden were conspicuous in the House of Commons in leading the movement there against the Corn Law. Why, I may tell you that during the last year, 1874 or 1873, in one of the two last years, more than 80,000,000*l.* worth sterling of food which previous to the agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws was mostly

forbidden to come in,—more than 80,000,000*l.* sterling, I say, came into this country and was consumed. Half the working men throughout the kingdom are now fed by food that comes from abroad, which was prevented from coming to us at that time, and that now comes in mainly in consequence of the continuous, enlightened, and devoted services of the gentlemen to whom I have referred. Take a late lamented friend of mine. As we get older we seem to have almost more friends in the other world than we have in the world wherein we are still permitted to live. Take the case of Mr. John Lewis Ricardo. He was a free-trader of the most enlightened kind, and by him mainly the Navigation Laws were abolished, and free-trade principles were applied to shipping. From that time to this the growth and the prosperity of our commercial marine have scarcely known a check, and it has become one of the most marvellous things in the history of the world. Last, but by no means least, I may refer to the great and priceless labours of my friend Mr. Milner Gibson in connection with the freedom of the press. I cannot stop to tell you of the condition of the press thirty or forty years ago. It was not absolutely forbidden by law that you should have a newspaper, but by the taxes the newspapers were so strangled that comparatively few could live. Those that could live were very dear, and they were in every way inferior to the newspapers that we have now-a-days. With School Boards and the spread of education, and the growth of knowledge amongst the young, the newspaper will become a still greater agent for the spread of intelligence, and there is no man that I know now who has done a greater and more lasting service to the working classes of this country than the man who was mainly instrumental in striking off all the taxes upon the press. Not one of these gentlemen was selected to represent particular classes. They did not represent manufacturers, or cotton spinners, or workers in metals, or coal owners. They were not called upon to

represent working men. They were to represent the great, and honourable, and true principles which had found a lodgment in their own souls. I have the satisfaction, of which I never can be deprived, that I gave my humble service to most of these principles, and alongside of these men; but according to the doctrine which is now preached, and the explanation of it, although I have done some work in my time, I am by no means to be called a working man.

What we want throughout the country amongst the Liberal party—and if there be anything that the Liberal party is good for, and will hereafter be good for, it is for the great masses of the people—is intelligent union amongst all classes of the party. We want perfect disinterestedness; we want, if we can get it, an absence of personal vanity, which is the bane of political life. And we want, in addition to these, earnest and combined work, and in these only, in my judgment, are to be found the sources of permanent success. To create a working men's section in the House of Commons or in the constituencies is to destroy the unity and the momentum of party, and to subject ourselves infallibly to the superior tactics of our opponents.

I think I have said enough, but before I have done I may say that I came here on Monday depressed and burdened. The times are not exciting, nor are they favourable to any clear indication to the mind of a speaker what are the topics which he should treat or how they should be treated. I found myself reluctantly driven, as the meeting approached, to the consideration of the great question which I discussed at some length on Monday evening. No one will believe, I hope, that I have been actuated in that course by any wish to disturb the unity of the Liberal party, or that I have any wish to turn public indignation against the Established Church. I spoke as I felt. I spoke with tenderness, with sincerity and respect to the thousands who are doing religious work within the borders of the Church of England. I threw out what

I thought would be some seed to scatter over the land, to give, as I said, some humble contribution to the discussion of a question which cannot be evaded, a discussion which I am not the first to enter upon, and to promote that which they are most actively promoting who have the greatest interest in letting it alone.

To-night I have dwelt upon questions that are nearer to us —the conduct of Birmingham, its political association, its grand political characteristics, the example which it offers to the constituencies of the kingdom, and the manner in which it does its own work. It asks and appeals to constituencies all over the kingdom to follow its example as far as they may be able to do it—to do their own work well, in order that the country's own work may be done well. I said that I came here dejected and burdened. I have felt an inexpressible relief since I have been here. I have had pleasure in coming here many times, but on no former occasion have I had a more distinct and sensible feeling of satisfaction than on this occasion. I have enjoyed the kindness of my immediate friends, and have partaken of the sympathy of thousands of my constituents. I feel with my colleagues—I am sure I may speak for them as much as for myself—that we represent a noble constituency, amongst whom is found a remarkable and growing political life, capable of being of great service to a great nation, and I may for them, and for myself, say with the utmost sincerity, that we are grateful to you for the kindness which you have shown us continually, and for the constant and animating confidence which you have hitherto reposed in us.

XVII.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 22, 1876.

[On this day the three members for Birmingham made their annual speeches in the Town Hall, the chairman being the Mayor, Mr. Chamberlain, now one of the members for the Borough. Apart from the interest always felt at Birmingham in these meetings, an additional curiosity was felt on this occasion, because it was rumoured that certain advocates of labour representation had resolved to challenge, by an amendment, the usual vote of confidence in the sitting members, in order to procure if possible from the audience an expression of opinion which should be favourable to the views which the promoters of this movement entertained. Some of the supporters of the Claimant's cause also endeavoured to obtain a hearing. But the audience declined to hear the speakers on both these topics, and rejected the proposals which were offered almost unanimously.]

A PERIOD of twelve months has passed away since the last occasion on which my colleagues and myself were permitted to stand face to face with our constituents; and during that period there has passed away a Parliamentary Session which may be described as a Session of small measures, and a Parliamentary recess, or the larger portion of it, in which we have had great discussions, in all parts of the country, about the measures of that Session. I shall not dwell on the subjects which have been so much discussed—subjects I mean connected with the legislation of the past year—and I shall ask you to forgive me if I do not touch upon the question of the loss of the Vanguard, and if I pass over the question of the Slavery Circular with one observation.

To me that topic is not so entirely easy as many of our friends have supposed, but this question has always presented itself to me when I have read anything, or thought anything about it, Why could not the Government let it alone? We may hear, when Parliament meets, an answer; and I shall not be sorry if it be satisfactory, to that question. Nor shall I call your attention to the great Stock Exchange transaction in which the Government has been concerned. I recollect some years ago that the present Prime Minister, in a speech which he made in the House of Commons, spoke with contemptuous sarcasm of certain persons who bought and sold shares, and called it progress: and it may be that he has been engaged in buying shares, and perhaps calls it statesmanship. I shall be glad, too, if, when Parliament meets, an explanation of that transaction can be given which shall be entirely satisfactory to the nation.

But there is one part of the discussion which has taken place during the recess to which I shall ask your attention rather particularly. You probably recollect that a very eminent member of the Government—no less a person than the Foreign Minister—spent a few days lately in the famous city of Edinburgh, in which city he made three speeches—one of them to the students of the University, to which I need not further advert; one of them to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh and his friends, when they presented him with the freedom of the city—a speech that I thought sensible and highly judicious. But the speech to which I wish to advert particularly is the one which Lord Derby addressed to a large meeting, said to be composed of 3,000 persons, who were styled working men Conservatives of the city of Edinburgh. Now, whether there were 3,000 present or not I know not; but I doubt extremely whether 3,000 Conservative working men were there. For this I know—that when a general election takes place in Edinburgh the Conservative working men do not appear to be at home.

There are very few of you who have had the opportunity of hearing a Conservative statesman make a speech to Conservative working men. If you had you would have perceived the extreme difficulty he was in. He is obliged to deny or to forget history, and his speech, for the most part, instead of informing his audience, appears generally to be intended to mislead them. If you read Lord Derby's speech—and I hope you did—you would find that he made this observation. 'When people ask why should a working man not be a Conservative? I answer, why should he not?' And he went on to make this extraordinary remark: 'Popular politicians,'—I do not know to whom he refers—I suppose he does not refer to his own colleagues—they cannot be of the popular politician kind—'Popular politicians never gave any man better wages or a better house to live in. They may indeed profess to remove grievances of a kind such as the law can deal with; but where are those grievances with us?' Well, from this he obviously intended to say that, so far as the working classes are concerned, one party is just as good as another, and that you may be just as happy and as contented with Conservative as with Liberal legislation and administration. Then he went on to say that the working men at present have no taxes to pay unless on the articles of tea, tobacco, and intoxicating drinks; but he did not tell them that thirty-five years ago there were more than 1200 articles on which taxes were levied, and that it was only after three years of persistent agitation by the Anti-Corn Law League, that the unpopular politicians began to remove those taxes, and that when Sir Robert Peel adopted the policy of reforming the tariff, every step that he made lost him a portion of the confidence of the great party of which he was then the leader and the Minister, and that when he came to the greatest of all articles—viz., corn, your daily bread—they quarrelled with him bitterly and vindictively, and drove him from power; and there was no obloquy

and no insult which they did not heap upon his character and his statesmanship.

Lord Derby says again, 'How is a working man situated with regard to the distribution of political power? He is master of the situation: his class can, if they choose, out-vote all other classes put together, having under the British Constitution, as it exists, supreme political power in their hands. Why, on earth, should working men be otherwise than conservative when that Constitution is concerned?' Well, but in private life character is supposed to go for something. If a man chooses a wife, or if a woman is deliberating whether she should accept such a man as her husband, or if you engage a servant, or an agent, or a trustee, surely character goes for something in all these things. And I have known it go so far—at any rate if I am not mistaken in my reading of the police reports—that in a court of justice it goes all the way between the six months' imprisonment and seven years' penal servitude. Now, consider all that has been done—the 1200 articles of the tariff that have been swept away, the change that has been made as to the importation of corn. Let us look at that one question. Think of the harvest we had this year. A very extensive miller told me the other day that it was the worst harvest, he believed, in this country for forty years, and that he had not ground a single quarter of English wheat since harvest. If the policy of these men had remained our policy now, the food of half the people of this country would have been somewhere beyond the sea, absolutely inaccessible to the people of England. And it is the same with sugar. Who abolished the monopoly in sugar? Who abolished the monopoly in ships? Who abolished the monopoly in newspapers? You get one of your admirable papers for a penny every day; whilst when the Liberal party took the question in hand the newspapers had every day on every paper a stamp of fourpence, and you did not get half so good a paper then, at the price

of sevenpence, as you get now for a penny, from which you know what is going on all over the world every morning. Take the commercial treaty with France, which has done so much for commerce between these two countries—which has made us more friendly and more peaceable than we ever were before; which has been the forerunner and the cause of many other commercial treaties between European countries. That commercial treaty was opposed by almost the whole of the Tory party, led on with his utmost force by the present Prime Minister of that party.

But now we will go to the question of political power which Lord Derby has spoken of. He says that you have political power in your hands, and you can outvote all other classes. Well, it is not true. But if it were true, you have not to thank Lord Derby for it. When the Bill of 1866 was introduced by Lord Russell and Mr. Gladstone, though it only proposed to enfranchise in boroughs down to 7*l.* householders, yet Lord Derby and his friends opposed it to the very utmost, and Lord Derby himself moved or seconded an amendment or amendments which were intended to destroy the Bill, and the whole party voted for the amendment which did ultimately destroy the Bill, and destroyed the Government. And they destroyed the Bill because they said that it was not safe to go down to a 7*l.* franchise; that it would admit too many of the working classes; that it would give them more power than would be safe; and then, having come back into power, Lord Russell having resigned, this reactionary and obstructive party coming into office, for no object in the world that I can see but in the hope that they might remain in power for six months longer, with the chance of whatever else might come—agreed to a far larger measure than that which they themselves had condemned as utterly destructive to the constitution of the country. But then it is a fact worth observing, that, with regard to this question of the franchise, at the present

moment, the household franchise only extends to the boroughs: it does not extend to the counties. Well, but if there are 13,000,000 of people living in the boroughs in the United Kingdom there are 18,500,000 that live in the counties; and in the counties working men have no vote.

You have landowners, of course. They have votes, and they have great power. The farmers, if they have a rating of more than 12*l.* a year, also have a vote, and all other persons rated as high as 12*l.* a year; but I suppose there are a hundred towns in the United Kingdom of nearly 10,000 inhabitants each in which there is no franchise lower than that 12*l.* rating, and the 12*l.* rating is equal to about 16*l.* of rental; so that in your own town, and in all our boroughs, every man who has a house and is rated for his house has a vote, but in the other parts of the country not within the limits of boroughs he must be rated at 12*l.*, or pay a rental of 15*l.* or 16*l.*, before he can have a vote in the county. Thus it is quite clear that this statement of Lord Derby is not to be received without large exceptions. If you take the borough members throughout the United Kingdom, you will find that there was a majority of Liberals of nearly fifty at the last election; but if you go to the counties you find there was a majority of about a hundred of the Conservatives; and it was that portion of the constituencies in which the working people are excluded, by which the Conservative majority was returned, and not by the boroughs, in which workpeople have votes.

Now, in this speech which I am criticising Lord Derby went on to another question. He was anxious, apparently, to find out if there was anything in the country which would justify working men in being Liberal rather than Conservative, and he made this observation. He says: 'Great stress has been laid by a certain class of politicians on the supposed fact that only a rich man has a chance of becoming an owner of the soil, and that is held up as one of those wrongs which ought to be remedied before any poor man

should call himself a Conservative.' He says 'this is a great exaggeration in fact,' and then he adds that 'it has been asserted again and again—and even Mr. Mill and Mr. Bright have endorsed the assertion—that the whole soil of the country was divided among 30,000 proprietors.' And then he said that he had been instrumental in procuring a return, but which was not yet completed—I believe it is completed with regard to Scotland—and he thinks that it will be found, there will not be 30,000 but 600,000 proprietors in one way or other permanently interested in the soil. Well, everybody at the end of his life will be permanently, somewhere or other, in possession of the soil, and it would be almost as reasonable for Lord Derby to have defended our land laws on the ground of universal possession of land, on the fact that everyone might expect to have a grave, as to say that at present there is that kind of possession of land by the people which is indicated by the statement which he has made. And then he says, 'Why should we stop here? What is the need that our law should stop here? Why should there not be even far more proprietors than there are?' He says that no man who reads the advertisements in the papers can doubt that there is land enough for sale to meet all possible wants. And, he might have said, if there had been no corn coming into this country this year, bad as our harvest has been, still there would have been corn to be bought by those who had the money and could pay the price. There is a story, I think, of a French princess who was very much astonished to hear, when there was some revolutionary or riotous movement in Paris, of people clamouring that they had no bread. She said, 'Why do they not buy cakes?' She saw plenty of cakes in the confectioners' shops. He says, 'If there is a desire to purchase land, why not form companies to buy properties and to divide them?' And then he concludes, 'My argument is, there is no obstacle in our law to make its gratification impossible or difficult.'

Now let me ask your attention to this for two or three minutes. Lord Derby is a man very superior to many of his order and of his party. He has always been industrious; he is well informed; he is not troubled with many prejudices; I am not sure whether he has strong convictions—I know that on many things he has held Liberal opinions, but I confess I am astonished that he should have dared to make statements with regard to the land such as he has made, with the knowledge that he ought to have, even to those unenquiring gentlemen who are called the 3,000 Conservative working men of the city of Edinburgh, and that he should have made these statements in that city and in that country, where the monopoly of land is the closest, probably, of any part of the United Kingdom. From this very return which he has obtained, it turns out that 5,000,000 of acres out of less than 19,000,000 in Scotland — that 5,000,000 acres, or considerably more than one-fourth of the whole of Scotland, are in the possession of twenty-one persons—that 8,000,000 acres, which is not far short of one-half of all Scotland, are in the possession of forty-nine persons; that 14,560,000 acres, or more than three-fourths of all Scotland, are in the possession of 583 persons. And if you were to take all the square miles of all the estates, of all the farms, of all the acres of the surface of Scotland, seventeen out of nineteen are in the possession of 2,583 persons; and of the other —his return shows that there are 132,000 proprietors, but the whole of the rest of them—the whole of the rest of the population do not possess more than the largest proprietor in Scotland, and do not possess more than one-fourth of an acre each. In point of fact, one proprietor in Scotland holds nearly as much land as 3,000,000 of its population.

Now I want to ask you how this comes about? I have given you Scotland; I will give you a fact with regard to Ireland. About a fortnight ago there was a letter in the *Times* from Mr. Fitzgerald, well known as the Knight of

Kerry, a very respectable gentleman, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting many years ago. Mr. Fitzgerald wrote a letter to the *Times* in defence of the proprietors of land in Ireland, who are being attacked, as you know, constantly on the subject of tenure and the subject of rent; and he says that in Ireland there are 6,000[1] proprietors and 600,000 occupiers. Well, if there be only 2,583 persons in Scotland to seventeen-nineteenths of the soil, and if there be only 6,000 proprietors in Ireland, which is almost all the extent of Scotland, it would appear that the statement which Lord Derby says that Mr. Mill and I had endorsed cannot be very far from the truth. But if we take England—England and Wales—the acreage is about equal to Scotland and Ireland united, and if in England and Wales land be no more divided than it is in Scotland—I am not going to say it is not, because I believe it is, owing to the greater population and the greater wealth—but if the land in England and Wales were no more divided than it is in Scotland, then seventeen-nineteenths of the whole of the surface of England and Wales would be in possession of 5,166 persons. And take the whole proprietorship of Ireland as given by Mr. Fitzgerald, and take seventeen-nineteenths of Scotland and the same proportion of England, and it would leave us with 13,749 proprietors of the soil in the United Kingdom. When we are talking of proprietors of the soil we are not speaking of the man who owns a few yards or a few roods or a quarter of an acre of land, upon which his house stands; but we are speaking of those who are occupying and cultivating the land, or who are letting it to others to occupy and cultivate; and we are speaking of the political power which has been for generations the greatest in this country, which is enormous now, and which, whenever it chooses to act in Parliament, in spite of the household suffrage in your boroughs, bears down all your

[1] Mr. Fitzgerald understated the number of proprietors in Ireland, and subsequently corrected his mistake.

opinions and carries any measure which it thinks necessary for its own interest.

Now, I must ask you a question, which it would be well if Lord Derby would endeavour to answer. My question is—is there not something strange in this partition of the soil I have described to you? Remember that property in the soil is the most universal of any property in the country. You cannot stand anywhere but that you are upon it. It is the most solid of any property in the country; the most certain as a possession and an investment; it is more desired by all classes of people than any other kind of property in the country; and it is the foundation of all other property, yet the people—and I use the term advisedly—are shut out, and a handful of men are the possessors, as I have shown you, of at least seventeen-nineteenths of it. Do not suppose that I am blaming any of these men. Not in the least; they have had nothing to do with making any law, or, purposely, of any custom which has led to this state of things. They are, in their circumstances, living as honourably, and acting, probably, as well as possessors of property in any other station of life. But I maintain that there is a cause, and that cause is to be found in the state of our law, and in customs which have arisen from and are supported by the law.

May I ask your attention to one argument that has always appeared to me to have great force. Suppose there were no law of Parliament to interfere with the possession of land. You can see at once that there are natural causes which promote accumulation and natural causes which promote dispersion. Of the natural causes which promote accumulation, you would say, for example, the desire to possess land, which appears to be universal, the certain security which it gives to property and to investment, the social position which the possession of land gives, more or less, in almost every country, and the charm which there is in country life. Dr. Johnson, I think, recommended everybody in delicate health to take a

walk of two miles every morning before breakfast, and he added a very good piece of advice, if it could only be followed —that he should take a walk on his own land. If there are these forces of accumulation, there are also forces of dispersion, and the greatest and the chief of these is death. The death of the possessors, as a matter of course, in almost every kind of property—and in this, if it were not for the law—would tend necessarily in some degree to the dispersion of the property. The extravagance of the owner, his folly and his vice tend also to dispersion; the desire for change of locality, the desire for change of investment. Thus you see there are natural forces at work which cause or promote the accumulation of land, and natural forces which as certainly cause and promote the dispersion of land. What we are arguing for is this—that these forces should be allowed to work naturally and freely, and that the law should not in any way interfere with them, but that land should change just as easily, and should go into the possession of other people by that change, as any other kind of property which men possess. And the result of such change in the law would be that land as a whole would find itself always in the possession of that class and those classes of the population which would do the best for the land itself and for the people who dwell upon it.

I have read to you the statement of Lord Derby that, in his opinion, there is no obstacle in our law to make the gratification which comes from the possession of land either impossible or difficult. In answer to that I will read to you an extract from a work by a lawyer quite competent to give an opinion on this question, and I shall leave his answer as a complete reply to the question of Lord Derby. The passage I am just going to read to you I have extracted from a work called 'The Social Condition and Education of the People in England and Europe.' It was written twenty years ago, by Mr. Joseph Kay, who is a Queen's Counsel, and most competent to give an opinion on this question. He says:

'These laws were passed, were framed, and have been retained for the express purpose of keeping the land in the hands of a few proprietors, and depriving the peasants and small shopkeepers of any part of it and of the influence which its possession confers, and of supporting a great landed proprietary class, in order to uphold the system of aristocratic Government, and to give greater strength and stability to the Crown. It may be stated generally that these laws enable an owner of land, by his settlement or will, so to affect his estate that it cannot possibly be sold, in many cases, for about fifty years, and in some cases for sixty, seventy, or a hundred years, after the making of the settlement or will.'

Perhaps many persons here may not be aware that this is almost the only country in Europe, I may even say, the only country in the world, in which laws of this kind prevail. They exist to some extent in Russia, and in some parts of Austria; but in Germany, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, France, and the United States these laws are abolished; and every person there can sell or dispose of his land during his own life. If he dies without a will the law divides his land equally between his children. The law does not there make one son rich and leave all other sons and daughters poor. What would you think in this country if any rich landowner, having say six children, were to doom five of them to ignorance, to shut them out from education, from the training belonging to their position in life, and should give that training and education only to one child? But it would be no more monstrous than that he should shut them all out from his property, and give the whole of it to the one child. And yet such is our law, such is the custom of the country, based, I will say, upon the most immoral principle which law has ever sanctioned. What we ask is this, for freedom of bequest, not for a forced partition of land. We ask that the land shall be the absolute property of each succeeding generation of men. And what are the results of our system? That our tenantry are less independent probably than any other tenantry in the world; and our agricultural labourers, as you know, are and have been the most abject and most hopeless class of our labouring

population. The repeal of the Corn Laws did not leave them untouched by its beneficent hand, for I believe that the wages of agricultural labour throughout this country have risen certainly more than 50 per cent. during the last thirty years under the operation of that great change in the law which the present Prime Minister and his party declared was to ruin the land, and especially to beggar the labourer. But although the labourer is better off than he was then, still I am obliged to admit what has been said of him by a paper that I have never before had to quote with approval, I speak of the *Saturday Review*—I recollect two or three years ago reading an article in the *Saturday Review* on this question of the land, and I noticed an observation in it so striking and remarkable, that I could not forget it. The writer said that if our agricultural system be a paternal system, our agricultural labourer is its disinherited child.

But the country gentlemen and Lord Derby and his friends are perhaps not aware of this fact—that refusal to come to some just arrangement on this question induces men to turn their eyes in directions some of which, in my opinion, are not only erroneous, but perilous. I think the proposition that I hear made that nobody should have any profit arising from the growth in value of the land he possesses, or that there should be a probate duty levied upon the land to the amount of 10 per cent., and that upon any man's death his property in the soil—one-tenth of all his acreage—shall be taken and divided amongst the peasantry of his neighbourhood, or that we should have a law of equal partition, such as prevails in many parts of Europe—I think these propositions come naturally from our present law and the present state of things, and to adopt any of them would only be going from one extreme of error and of evil to another. And, therefore, I repudiate the laws we have—the partition laws of some foreign countries—those propositions to which I have referred—I repudiate them all. I say there is a sound and a just principle

upon which land should pass from one owner to another, by which all men in each generation, possessing land, shall have the power to deal with it as they like, and that the dead man and the dead hand shall not declare for half a century to come what shall be done with the estate.

But I must pass, in conclusion, to one other proposition or statement of Lord Derby's, and which has been made by a great many people — and this is, that the Liberal party is without a policy. Our friend the Mayor has spoken of this, and he hoped that somebody in this meeting would be able to say something about the policy of the party. Now, I have been rather disposed to think that our party has far too much policy. Judging from the speeches of some of our friends, and judging from discussions and resolutions at certain conferences, I should say that at present we have far too much policy—more than I ever knew us to have before. I should like to suggest something for the Liberal party, and although it may appear presumptuous in me to do it, I still think you will admit that it is consistent with all we have been doing in the past, and that it is not less excellent for the future than that which we pride ourselves on having accomplished in years that are gone. Has it ever occurred to you in Birmingham—there is no great congregation could be assembled in the kingdom more appropriate to put the question to than this which I see before me—has it ever occurred to you that during our lifetime, or for the last forty or fifty years, the towns of the United Kingdom have not only made the policy of the country, but have had the greatest gain out of that policy as it has been gradually transferred into law? In the Reform Bill of 1832 the towns got a franchise of 10*l.*, the counties got a franchise of 50*l.* I speak of occupation. In the Reform Bill of 1867 the towns got a household franchise, the counties got only a 12*l.* rated, which means a 16*l.* rental franchise.

In 1835 the towns got one of the best measures that ever

was passed by the English Parliament—that is, the Corporations Reform Act—a most admirable Act, which gave self-government to almost all the towns in the United Kingdom. What has been the value of that Corporation Act? Look at your town. People complain that they have rates. Of course they have; but if they send good men to their town councils, and have such men as you have for their Mayor, you may rely upon it that you get value for that which you have to expend. If you had no police, and no lights, and no supply of water, and no gas, and no pavement, and no drains, Birmingham could not exist. That would be all. It would not merely make you uncomfortable, but you actually could not exist. I say there is nothing better in the world that I am acquainted with than the municipal governments of this country; and if they do not always turn out to be as good as we wish, it is because the people who make them and administer them are not themselves quite so good as we wish. But in the counties there is no Corporations Reform Bill. Their rates and their powers are administered by a number of country gentlemen who are county magistrates. I do not say that they are not doing often the very best they can. They do not admit a great many persons into their number whom we think would be very useful, and there are counties, I am told, in which there is scarcely a single Nonconformist ever found upon the county bench of magistrates. These country gentlemen exert whatever powers they have, I dare say, as wisely as they know how, considering how difficult it is to be always disinterested, and how most of us make many blunders in the course of our lives. But I think the smaller towns and villages in the counties which are not included within the Parliamentary borough limits have as good a right to municipal goverment as we have in the towns.

Take another Bill—the Education Bill of 1870. It was a faulty Bill in some respects, and I am not sure that

sometimes we have not, considering the almost insuperable difficulties of the subject, been somewhat harsh upon those who permitted the faults to pass. It might have been more courageous to have rejected the Bill, and to have appealed to the country to support a better Bill. The Bill has many faults; but, at the same time, it is doing, no doubt, a good work. But even this Education Bill —be it good or bad—call it as good as its friends say it is—is confined almost entirely to the towns. It does not extend over the country and rural districts, and you will observe that nearly all the experiments of legislation, and I must say, too, all the good things in the way of freedom, Parliament gives far more readily to the towns than it has, during our time at least, given to the counties. With regard to the investments of tenants in their improvements of the soil, how difficult is it to do anything; with regard to the game laws, how impossible to do anything whatever. The fact is, in the counties, the landlords—those owners I have spoken of—are the real electors, and the tenant farmers are the unreal electors, and the labourers and all persons whose rents are under 15*l.* a-year, or not equal to a 12*l.* rating, all those have the door shut in their faces just as they used to shut the door in your faces only a few years ago. What I think we ought to consider is this state of things. The country is in a condition of paralysis; the towns are free, their suffrage is free, their industry is free, their commerce, foreign and domestic, is free; but the country districts are in a condition of paralysis. They have really no franchise, they have no free representation, the soil—which is their great property, which they till, and upon which they live—is held close bound in a law-created monopoly, and whilst the smallest number of persons connected with the land—namely, the owners—have absolute power in nearly every county to return representatives to Parliament, by far the largest body, much larger than the other two—much larger than the owner and occupier —the labourer, is absolutely shut out from the franchise.

I know what people will tell you; they will give you two reasons to which I must just advert before I finish. They will tell you that if you give the franchise to the counties, and to all the population, you must have a redistribution of seats. Well, that is nothing to the purpose. We want very much a redistribution of seats now. The electors of this borough are, I believe, not far short of 60,000; but are you aware of the fact that there are seventy members in the House of Commons at this moment whose whole constituencies put altogether are not more than 60,000? Therefore, you send three members to Parliament, representing 60,000 of the industrious population of Birmingham, and they are met by seventy members, who do not all vote against us, for a great many of them vote with us; still, for all that, these seventy have not altogether a larger constituency than we have. So that you see that the redistribution of seats is a necessity now, and it will not be more necessary, but it will be more certain, more sure to come, if the franchise is extended to the counties. Another argument is this—that the agricultural labourers do not know much of politics. I am afraid to some extent that is true. You recollect that I have been sometimes criticised for using a Latin word to describe an unpleasant fact—the word residuum. During the 10*l.* franchise there was a residuum in every borough that was often bad to manage. It was ignorant, it was unprincipled, it was sometimes drunken, it was often corrupt. Now, with the wide suffrage of household there is also a residuum, and the wider the suffrage, as a matter of course to some extent, the larger will be the class to which I have referred; and, of course, in the counties, if you give the franchise to the labourers, there will also be a residuum. That is a fact we cannot get rid of. There is a residuum in the House of Lords. There are lords who are what are called out-at-elbows, bankrupt in purse, and bankrupt in character; but it does not follow from that that the House of Lords as a body does not consist of men of great

wealth and of high character too. And there is a residuum in the Church. No one would more readily admit than I do the high character, and the great services, and the devotion, and the disinterestedness too, of a great portion of the clergy of the Church of England, for example; but there are some very odd specimens amongst them. I will not mention any names, but there is one somewhere in this neighbourhood. If I were myself a Churchman, I should wish that particular specimen of the residuum either got rid of or converted. There is a residuum almost everywhere, and, so there will be a residuum if you extend the franchise to the county population, but it will every day be growing less, we trust; and at any rate, we shall find that the whole power of the county representation, nearly throughout the three kingdoms, but more in England than in either Ireland or Scotland, will not remain in the hands of a very small number of persons that happen by descent or fortune—some it may be by their virtues—to have become possessors of the main proportion of the soil in the counties.

Then, I say, that the Liberal party having done so much for the towns, might turn its attention to, and try to do something for the counties. Why should not we enfranchise the population of the counties, and give freedom to the soil which they till? It was a saying, that I have quoted before, of my friend Mr. Cobden when discussing this question. He said,—

'The men who come forward to deliver the land of this country, to make it as free as its produce is free, will have conferred as great a boon upon the country as we of the Anti-Corn League have conferred by the abolition of the Corn Laws.'

Then, Lord Derby says, what is that which Liberals are supposed to have and which Conservatives have not? I will tell him. I think the Liberals and the Liberal party, whether you take its history from the Revolution, or whether you take a shorter period within the memory of many of us since the

time of the passing of the first Reform Bill, have shown a sense of justice and unselfishness in their policy which has never been shown by what is called the Conservative party. I ask any man to show one measure that we, as a Liberal party, have ever advocated or have succeeded in carrying whose object or effect has been private or class gain as opposed to the public interest. And now, if I propose to you to move forward, having done what you have done for the towns, with a view of doing something for the counties, what we ask you is that you shall free the counties as you have freed the towns; that you shall free the men, and the soil they cultivate. Here is a policy consistent with everything that we have done in the past. It is a policy worthy of all the hopes, and the high hopes, of a great party for the future.

There are a good many working men here. They are not like the working men in Edinburgh, found all away from their homes at a general election. They are all here, and they are all ready—they have been since I knew them—ready to support members who have not betrayed or deserted them. I may appeal to you, the electors, who are working men; for it is to you that Lord Derby has been speaking. I tell you that your own powers are dwarfed and crippled by the paralysis which extends over the county representation, and if you could only examine the question fairly you would find that what I am asking you to undertake is to strengthen and confirm your own powers whilst you are extending your franchises and rights to your fellow-countrymen in the counties. Give to the people who are now excluded that freedom which the Constitution has given to you; give them the freedom of the soil upon which they live, and you will invite them,—and with a cordial hand you will receive them,—you will invite them to partake of that sublime justice which injures no one, but is rich in blessings and in benefits to all who are permitted to share it.

XVIII.

MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 2, 1876.

[The President of the Manchester Reform Club, Mr. Benjamin Armitage, invited the members of the Club to a soiree at the Club-house in King Street. Mr. Bright had agreed to be present, at first merely to a social gathering, at which he might meet many of his old friends. But in the interval between the issue of the invitations, and the appointed day, certain events of serious significance had occurred in South Eastern Europe, and, as Mr. Armitage said, something like an autumn session had been held out of Parliament. Mr. Bright in the following address dealt with the political situation.]

I FEEL oppressed when I think upon the difficulties of the position in which I stand. After the observations which have been addressed to the meeting, I am surprised to find myself here, because, as you know, I have endeavoured for a long time past to avoid attendance at public meetings and public banquets of every description. But your president is one of my oldest friends. I know, as you know, that he has been associated with us in every good cause for many years past, and how difficult it is to object to anything that he asks us to consent to. I recollect, too, the services, the character, and the long friendship of his venerable father; and when he did me the honour to ask me to come to this meeting to-night, I felt that my objections—I suppose it was a moment of weakness—gave way, and I consented to come. I am really touched with the kind reception which

you have offered me, and with the kind words which have been spoken with regard to me.

This building is the Club-house of the Manchester Reform Club. It is a building, therefore, I presume, in which we are at liberty to discuss political questions. It is not an agricultural dinner meeting, where it is understood that politics are forbidden, but at which politics—and often to us of a very unsatisfactory kind—are generally spoken. We are not forbidden here, even to look at matters from a party view. We are a very formidable portion of the Liberal party of this town and district, and therefore we have free liberty to discuss political questions to-night as we think best. Now, we differ very much from our opponents on the question of party. With us we have, as they have—but I am afraid not so perfectly as they have—the machinery of party. We devote the whole power of our party machinery not to party but to general and public objects; and if we cast our eyes back during the time which some of us clearly remember, we shall find, I think, that this is true, that if we have done anything to extend political freedom it has been the freedom of all, as far as we could extend it. If under our auspices religious liberty has been in any manner extended, no man's religious liberty has been in the slightest degree curtailed. If by any measures which we have supported employment has been rendered more constant and wages have been raised, it has not been done or attempted to be done through the monopoly of law or the monopoly of trade unions. It has been attempted to be done, and has been done, by measures broad and great, extending over the whole people, and whose beneficent action has been felt, and, I hope, is now appreciated by all. If the people are better fed by anything we have done, no man has found his table barer or his cupboard less furnished. I suppose at this moment if all the working men and their families in the three kingdoms could be put in the scales they would weigh some thousands of tons more than

they would have done thirty years ago. If the people are better clothed by any of those measures, there is not one more of them in rags. If they are better housed, there is not one more of them without shelter, or sheltered only by a hovel. If there are advantages of education greater than there were, by means of schools and the circulation of newspapers, those are advantages which have been extended broadly even to the poorest and the lowest.

I was only a fortnight ago in the county of Durham, and I had the opportunity there for two or three days of reading a little paper published at Darlington, the *Northern Echo*—a small paper, but admirably conducted. It has, I am told, a circulation which at its present rate of increase must reach or pass 20,000 copies each morning. Well, this little paper goes for a whole week into the house of every pitman in that county who chooses to take it in. It goes there bringing him all the news, concisely put and accurately reported, from all parts of the world; and he has in his pitman's house the news just as early and as certainly as it reaches the great ducal mansion of Raby Castle. I think that is a great thing to have accomplished for the people, and it is one of those things which we have done. Now, if the people are more content, if they are more satisfied with the legislation of Parliament or with the general administration of the country, this arises during the last thirty or forty years from measures with which we have been intimately connected—measures which we have never originated or promoted or carried with reference to party objects, but with reference to something greater and much higher and nobler—the general good of the whole people.

If we have been able thus to interfere—as I trust, honestly and with advantage—in home affairs, I would ask whether at a time like this we are able entirely to close our eyes to the foreign complications in which at this moment unhappily we are somewhat entangled. The only people in

the country who have been able to close their eyes and their ears are Her Majesty's Ministers; and it has taken the voice, almost the cry, of the universal nation to rouse them from the lethargy in which they seem to have been living. But some of my friends tell us that we should not be hard upon them, because if there has been an error it is an error in which both parties have participated—that the leaders of the Tory party and the leaders of the Liberal party were alike involved in the mistakes—I had almost said, and perhaps I ought to say, the crimes—of twenty years ago. Well, I grant that both parties were concerned in the mistakes and the crimes of that period, but the difference between the two parties now is this, that the leaders of the Liberal party have learned something, while the leaders of the Tory party appear to have learned nothing. For myself—I say it most conscientiously—I have been glad to have been silent during all these transactions. I wrote, as you know, some two or three weeks ago, a letter to a friend of mine in Birmingham, which was published; but I have declined to attend some scores of meetings to which during the last two months I have been invited. In fact, my position on this question is one which is very peculiar and very difficult; for there are few men so prominent as I have been in the politics of the country who twenty years ago occupied the place and held the views which I then held.

But though I have much difficulty in approaching the subject, still I can say, as our president said on another matter, that I have nothing to recant. Twenty-two years ago, in the year 1854, as you know, I differed from the Government of the day, and differed from what appeared to be the vast majority of the people, on the question of the war with Russia. I was overpowered, as you also know. Numbers, and ignorance, and passion, were combined against me, and I was of course outvoted and declared to be unwise and unpatriotic; and I know not the length of the list of unpleasant

adjectives that were used against me when discussing my course and my opinions at that time. I do not know why I differed from other people so much, but sometimes I have thought it happened from the education I had received in the religious sect with which I am connected. We have no creed which monarchs and statesmen and high priests have written out for us. Our creed, so far as we comprehend it, comes pure and direct from the New Testament. We have no 37th Article to declare that it is lawful for Christian men, at the command of the civil magistrate, to wear weapons and to serve in wars—which means, of course, and was intended to mean, that it is lawful for Christian men to engage in any part of the world, in any cause, at the command of a monarch, or of a prime minister, or of a parliament, or of a commander-in-chief, in the slaughter of his fellow-men, whom he might never have seen before, and from whom he had not received the smallest injury, and against whom he had no reason to feel the smallest touch of anger or resentment.

Now, my having been brought up as I was, would lead me naturally to think that going 3,000 miles off, for it is nearly as far as that by sea, to carry on the war with Russia in the Crimea was a matter that required very distinct evidence to show that it was lawful, or that it was in any way politic or desirable. Well, I studied the blue-books with great care. I had at that time the advantage of constant daily and hourly communication with our lamented friend Mr. Cobden, of whom I say not too much when I say that no man in our time has shown greater sagacity than he did on this question, and that no man was a wiser counsellor to a private friend, as I was—to a government or a nation—than he was during the whole course of his political life. Well, I came to the conclusion—it was impossible that I could come to any other—that the war of 1854 not only upon the principles of my sect, but upon the ordinary principles of all moral and

Christian men, was unnecessary, that it was impolitic, and that it was unjust. I cannot tell you how many eminent and leading men have now come to that opinion, but we have had sufficient recantations within the last month or two from so many persons that I need not introduce names here to prove what I say. But the objects of the war, as they were offered to the people at the time, were so extravagant that now as we look back upon it we can hardly understand how many could have become so much in favour of it. Some said that Russia, with its great military power, was going to bear down upon all Europe and destroy the liberty of all the nations of Europe; some said that Russia was about to take over to herself the government of 150,000,000 of people in India and drive England out of that great territory; some said we went to war for the purpose of liberating Poland; some said it was to prevent the Russian fleets from coming from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean; in fact, I know not what were the reasons that were offered to thoughtless and uninformed people to induce them to support Government and Parliament in that unhappy war. They were sufficient, and the war took place.

That it was disastrous, looking back twenty years, I think all men must admit. I am not speaking now of the valour of the troops, or of their failures in any contest in which they were engaged; I am speaking of it from a far higher point of view than that, and I say that it was a disastrous war; and to us now, looking back upon it, especially humiliating. I think that Mr. Kinglake says that more than half a million of lives, first and last, were sacrificed in that war, of which our share is supposed to be about 40,000. One hundred millions of money were spent by us. I am not speaking now of what other nations spent. I am not addressing other nations. The moment the war was over, though there was a reduction of armaments, still our military estimates remained, and have remained from that time to this,

at 10,000,000 sterling, or more, higher than they were before. Besides this, we entered into commercial transactions with an insolvent firm on the Bosphorus, to whom the people of England advanced large sums which there is no hope they will ever see again—to the amount probably of nearly 100,000,000 sterling; and it may be said, looking back to these loans, that at this moment there is no iron-clad that slumbers on the Turkish waters, there is not a musket, or a rifle, or a bayonet, or a sword by which a Servian has been killed in this war or the unarmed men and the hapless women and children were murdered in Bulgaria, that was not purchased and paid for by money borrowed from the credulous people of this country.

But after all, when the war was over we were told that two great objects had been gained. The one was that the fleet of the Russians in the Black Sea had been so limited that there could be no danger of its attacking Constantinople; another that Russia's treaty rights and protectorate over the Christian subjects of the Porte were abolished, or rather that they were transferred to the concerted action, to a sort of combination—of the Great Powers, under which Russia could do no further mischief, and Turkey could be kept to something like a humane and just action towards her Christian population. Well, now, what has happened? Fourteen years after that war—in the year 1870—the armies of Prussia vanquished the armies of France. France and England had garotted Russia in 1854-6; and having Russia down, had forced upon her that particular clause with regard to her Black Sea fleet; but the moment that Prussia had France down and England was left alone, then Russia rose up and said that she would no longer submit to a clause so unfair to her, as she judged, and so humiliating. She announced to Europe that the clause was at an end, as far as she was bound to regard it, and the Government of England, finding it unavoidable, consented to the abrogation of the clause. Well

then, with regard to the transaction of removing the protectorate of the Christians from Russia to the Great Powers of Europe, it should not be forgotten that Russia is on the spot. Her territories are adjacent to those of Turkey; her people are of the same religious belief and profession as the Christians of Turkey. They have had for generations a great sympathy with them, and of course they were more likely to keep a watchful eye over the aggressions, insults, and oppressions of the Turkish Government, and to be more capable friends than any nation at a greater distance from them. But when you put a matter of this kind into the hands of the six Powers, what becomes of it? Whereas the Russian protection was a reality, the protection of the conjoint Powers has been from that day to this only a sham. There has been no protection. Russia has been kept out of the field by the treaty. None of the six Powers was to meddle except they meddled together, and thought the time had come to do something. They never would have thought the time was come to do anything. The object of the Government of this country was to keep everything quiet, to keep the Turk there on his throne, the Sultan in his palace, the whole system as it has been for ages, the suffering unregarded, the cry unheard; and the concerted power of those great Governments of Europe has been of no influence whatever, and you have destroyed the only real protection which existed and have not established anything valid or useful in its place.

Eminent men who have discussed this question lately have spoken on this point; but there is not one of them that has asserted that the powers have really supplied the protection that was afforded by Russia before the Crimean War. The people of England, however, since that time have learned a good deal. They have learned a great deal very lately too; they have learned something slowly during the twenty years. They have learned what nearly every people learns after a war

—that they had been befooled by their own passions and by their rulers; and during these twenty years we have gradually come to the opinion that the cause after all was not worth going to war for, that there was nothing in it that was important for this country, and that nothing has been gained by it. But now we have been learning more rapidly. We have been hearing of an insurrection in a remote province in Turkey for, I suppose, the last twelve months; we have had also an announcement that the insolvent firm which I spoke of on the Bosphorus could not pay its debts; and, therefore, through the pocket, and through perhaps a nobler mode of communication, the people of England have come to a contrary opinion to that which they held twenty years ago, and they not only now are willing to condemn the war of that time, but are also willing to pronounce emphatically against following the example of that time. In fact, I think they have discovered that our old ideas upon the subject were foolish, and that some of our own pretensions and assumptions at that time were unjust and wicked. They have found out that the dread that Russia, with her great military despotism, was going to overshadow all Europe and destroy constitutional government and freedom over the whole continent, was a folly that no child even should have listened to. They have found out, too, that the idea that Russia was likely, if she got possession of Constantinople—to make her way to India and overthrow English power in that country, was a phantom that really had nothing in it; and I think they have found out also that the danger of the possession of a free passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles by Russia was one which England need not be afraid of.

The people of this country are probably not aware that for three hundred years after the possession of Constantinople by the Turks, no vessel—no vessel of trade even—was allowed to pass from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Turkey

for three centuries kept that passage closed, and it was only by the pressure of the Russian power, about a hundred years ago, that the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles were opened to ships from the Mediterranean. I should like to know upon what ground we, who are 3,000 miles away, should insist—that the Turks and ourselves combined should insist—upon the closing of the passage between the two seas to Russian or other ships of war. What have we been doing lately? What has this very Government been doing? It has been in a foreign country—in Egypt—endeavouring to purchase great authority over, not a natural highway, not a highway which Nature made, but an artificial highway which Frenchmen and French money for the most part made, in order that we might run not ships of trade only but ships of war also between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Surely, if we thought it necessary and right to take such a course as that, was it not just that the Russians, if they thought proper, should have a passage for their ships from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and that ships from the Mediterranean should proceed by that passage to the Black Sea?

But what are we to do now? that is the question. At this moment we are entangled with the treaty of 1856, and it is not easy I admit—I make the admission to the Government and their friends—it is not easy to back clean out of it, nor is it easy to tell exactly what to do in it. One way is this—we might tear the treaty into a thousand pieces and say, 'We were fools in 1854 and in 1856; we will be fools no longer.' We might in that case leave Turkey to her fate. But then there are the negotiations of the last few months, in which the Government has been concerned, which Parliament has not condemned, and which the public probably would not wholly and absolutely condemn. If we cannot tear the treaty to pieces, the question is, can we negotiate on new lines? That appears to me to be the only alternative. If the treaty remains,

and if we are to take some action with the other Powers of Europe,—if the people of England have changed their mind with regard to the policy of the country twenty years ago,—then we ask ourselves, is it not possible for the English Government to negotiate on new lines, on other principles, and with a better policy? But then, unfortunately, during the whole of the transactions of this year the Government has been going upon the old lines. They did not perceive that there was a great change in public opinion, nor did they perceive that the Country had made a great error twenty years ago. They are pro-Turkish during the whole of the correspondence which has been published in the blue-books; they seem almost to have forgotten everything that they ought to have remembered, and to have learnt nothing of that which they ought to have given special attention to.

Hitherto they have gone upon this theory: 'Preserve Turkey as she is, if you can. Suppress every rising as quickly as possible by Turkish arms—make peace somehow; and put an end to these things which threaten the peace of Europe without any consideration of the interests of the populations which are most nearly affected.' But whilst this was going on there was another rising, and a very important one—a rising of the people of England. The terrible cruelties that have been committed—and but a very small portion of them have been reported to us—have opened our eyes and have touched our hearts. But whilst this rising was going on, and whilst these events were being reported to us, the Government seemed to hear nothing and to know nothing. Their agents appeared to know little and to say little. The fact is every Minister of England in Constantinople, and every consul knows perfectly well that unpleasant tidings from those parts are not welcome reading for the Foreign Office. It was the same twenty-two years ago. We then pointed out what was the state of things in the Christian provinces of Turkey. We quoted from the Blue Books

and from the reports of our agents and consuls how dreadful was the condition of those provinces, and of the interior of Turkey; and that was very unpleasant matter for Lord Palmerston and his colleagues at the time when the Russian war was being discussed and when it was being fought. But though the Government did not hear and did not speak, others heard and others spoke; and when they spoke—and I say it with shame and sorrow—the Government, through its chief, ridiculed what was said, and dared even to deny its truth.

In the same manner there has been a feeling now in the House of Commons that, when the question was treated by the head of the Government, it was not treated with that seriousness which became so grave and so sad a question. There has not been from him, so far as I have heard, one word of hearty condemnation of those things which the nation universally condemns. There has not been, so far as I have heard from his lips in Parliament, any warmer sympathy expressed for the sufferers than there would have been if he had heard that a sudden massacre had taken place of the multitude of dogs which prowl about the streets of Constantinople. Perhaps ambition, the greatest ambition, may at length be sated; and a man from a certain eminence may look down with cold contempt on guilt, and on wrongs that even he dares no longer to deny. But, now, what is the position we stand in, and what action should this meeting, if we were a public meeting—which we are not—what action ought we to take? It is obvious that the Government so far is at variance with the nation. The Government is pro-Turk still, and would, if they could, act upon the lines of the past, which the nation has condemned. Observe the language of the Prime Minister in speaking the other day of the Servian war. It was not the language of regret. It was condemnation of the most offensive character—a condemnation which evidently sprung from his sympathy with the Turkish power. Take the

speeches of Lord Derby—more moderate, more argumentative, more according to his character; but still in those speeches there was none of that hearty sympathy for the sufferers, or condemnation for the Power that inflicted the suffering, which I think would have been grateful to the ears and hearts of the English people.

If you want to know what is the feeling of the Government, you have only to look at the writings of the Government press. I will not run over the list of their papers, for I am not acquainted with a great many of them; but if any man has read through the columns of the *Standard* for many weeks past, or if he has read the columns of their organ in this city, he will find out what they believe to be the feelings and wishes of their patrons, the Ministry of the day. And I am not surprised at this, because it would be a matter of wonder if we found these papers on any occasion taking the part of freedom and justice to these, or to any populations. On the contrary, they heap ridicule and contempt on the proclamations of change of opinion and policy which more than a hundred public meetings have announced to the whole world. The fact is that the nation looks one way and the Government looks another. There has been nothing like it in this country, I believe, since the time of the Reform Bill, when the Duke of Wellington was endeavouring to form an anti-reform government. There has been no such demonstration against the policy of a Government as there has been within the last two months. It is a very curious thing that this Government came into office with predictions that nothing was to be disturbed and everybody was to be gratified. Nevertheless, a year ago there were scores of public meetings condemning their conduct with regard to fugitive slaves. There were far more public meetings to denounce them then than there were to find fault with all the matters which Mr. Gladstone's Government had dealt with during the whole career of the late Administration. And now twelve months later we find

ourselves in a perfect hurricane of condemnation of this Government, which was to have put everything right, and to have thrown the preceding Government into oblivion and contempt.

Even a great many of our friends of the Established Church who generally go with them—even the archbishops, bishops, and dignitaries of the Church—have been as loud and as strong in their language as the sternest Nonconformist minister. There is not a class—we know not a class anywhere—that has not spoken out upon this question. I was reading reports of public meetings the other day, and no doubt many of you also read them, for the speeches made upon this question have been admirable. Amongst them there is the speech of Mr. Baxter at Montrose, and a speech by an honourable relative of mine at Huddersfield. From them one would expect excellent speeches on a question of this kind, though some might fear perhaps that they would be a little tinged with what is called a party view. But I found in the same paper a speech by the Marquis of Bath. I hope everybody read it. It is an admirable speech. I have marked two or three paragraphs which, if you will allow me, I will read, because, coming from a peer of his high rank, not connected with our party, but with the Government party, anxious to say little that would be offensive to his leaders, the speech is remarkable, and the passages strike me as doing honour to his head and heart. He says—

'The voice of England had declared that, so far as she had the power to prevent them, it should be impossible for such enormities to occur again. Parties of all shades of opinion, and clergy of all denominations, had especially distinguished themselves in the movement; and had, by resolutions and memorials, urged the Government to make a clear and explicit demand that Turkey should surrender all executive power in the disturbed provinces, and that freedom and self-government be secured to the Christians.'

Then he says—

'They had also especial duties from the liabilities they took upon themselves to protect the native Christians when they deprived them of Russian protection in 1856. Besides, it was not interference, but non-interference that

was really required. The English Government had but to withdraw its countenance and its support from the Turks, and Russia would deal with the question, and free its kindred races from Turkish despotism. Then, as to opening the door to Russian aggression, he had such confidence in the strength of his country that he believed if Russia was three times more powerful she could do England no harm. Of this he was certain—if the alternative lay between leaving the Provinces of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Bulgaria at the mercy of Turkey or letting Russia take them, let Russia have them, and God be with her.'

One other passage I will read. Speaking of the necessity of maintaining the integrity of the Turkish Empire, he says:—

'If by that was meant the nominal suzerainty of the Sultan and the exclusion of any other European Power, all would be well; but if by integrity of the Turkish Empire the power of taxation, of spoliation, of oppression over the Christians in those three provinces be maintained to the Turks, and if the English Government could be held responsible for it, there would be an outcry of national indignation against which no Government would be able to stand. What was demanded was that the Christian population in the provinces of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Bulgaria should have administrative independence; that the taxation or tribute be moderate, and fixed beforehand; that they should be free both of the Turkish people and Turkish authorities, and that the rulers set over them should be neither Turks nor Christians dependent on the Turkish Government. Those were the demands of almost all men, the only difference being between those who asserted and those who denied the intention of the Government to carry them out. They were all—Whig and Tory, Churchmen and Nonconformists—unanimous in that demand. Without departing from a single principle he had held to all his life, he found that he could stand there on a common ground with the most extreme and consistent Liberal. The sympathies engendered in behalf of a common Christianity, of a common humanity, rose superior to all the ties and obligations, all the associations and traditions of party.'

It would seem, taking Lord Bath as the representative of a large and powerful section of the community, that Ministers alone, if they are so hard and unyielding—and their press is with them, no doubt—are against morality and freedom. They tell us—the writers in their press—that England was as bad in the Indian Mutiny, and as bad on a smaller scale on the occasion of the unhappy transactions in Jamaica. But let me tell them that they supported those enormities whatever they were, and they are only following their own constant policy when they refuse to condemn the

infernal wickedness and cruelties that have been perpetrated by the Turks.

We have had a speech lately from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He does not speak in so unabashed a manner as his chief. To many thousands of Yorkshiremen who were listening to him the other day he said that 'England leads.' He said this most emphatically. But, up to this time, during the whole of the spring, what England has done has been not to lead, but to thwart, and in a certain way to menace when they thwarted, the proposals of the other Powers. If they did not intend it as such, the assembling of an enormous fleet at the mouth of the Dardanelles necessarily acted as a menace.

Let us lead; I have no objection, if we can lead in a policy of mercy and freedom. Let us dissolve partnership with a power which curses every land that is subject to it. One of our poets has said, and said truly—

> 'Byzantines boast that on the clod,
> Where once their sultan's horse has trod,
> Grows neither grass, nor shrub, nor tree.'

There is no doubt whatever that desolation and ruin are lasting memorials of the Moslem power on the once fertile shores of the Mediterranean. So our duty now, I think, is clear. If we cannot wash our hands of this whole business, if by reason of the Treaty of 1856, or by reason of the negotiations of the past few months, it is impossible for the Government to wash their hands of this whole matter, then I say that we ought to insist upon a new policy, and on that policy and along its lines the government, if it exists, and acts, and leads, ought not only to go, but resolutely to lead. It is only as the voice of the country demands, it is only as the finger of the country points. If they would do this even now, if the speech of the Prime Minister the other day had indicated that he had any sympathy with your views or any sympathy with your principles in these matters, he might

have restored to himself probably the confidence of the nation. But his speech had an entirely opposite effect. Of Lord Derby's private opinion we have abundant evidence. We have the speech which he made a dozen years ago, extracts from which you have seen in most of the newspapers. His opinions at that time, so far as I could gather them, are precisely the opinions that I have held all along upon this Eastern Question; but Lord Derby is one of twelve gentlemen who form the Cabinet and Ministers of the Queen. It might be possible to have some sort of confidence in him, and I am not without confidence in the wisdom of his opinions; but my confidence is shaken when I come to think of what he will do, and of the strength of his convictions.

But what are we to think of his chief? I say that the speech which he delivered the other day at Aylesbury was a speech of defiance to the people of England, a speech heartless and cruel as respects Servia and Bulgaria. There is a demand for an autumn Session. I believe nobody is more opposed to an autumn Session than a member of Parliament is; but though it is full of inconvenience, still the demand for it seems to me at this time constitutional and wise. The Ministers are at variance, and the Prime Minister in his speech defies the country. If there was a dissolution now, what would happen? I suspect the Ministers would fear it greatly. They would be swept off the boards, and in their place a new policy and a new Ministry would be installed. I think the chief who made that speech — a speech which I deeply regret, and I think by this time he must also have regretted it—would by that public opinion be swept from his pride of place and from his place of power. Let him meet Parliament, or let him meet the constituencies; I am not afraid of what would be the decision of the country. We regret, the country regrets, our past policy with regard to the Turkish Question. We

regret, the country regrets, the sacrifices of the Crimean War. We are not now anxious to go to war to defend the Turk, and we are not called upon, and do not intend to go to war to attack the enemies of the Turk. We are at a long distance from that part of the world. It is no business of ours to be sending ships and troops nearly 3,000 miles to effect territorial changes in which we have no real and no direct interest. If we left it to the course of nature—nature as explained to us by historic facts—the question some way would no doubt settle itself; but if we had a Parliament, or a dissolution and a general election, the policy of England would in my opinion be declared; and I freely state to you my judgment that we should have this solemn and irrevocable decision on the part of the people of this country; that the blood and the treasure of England shall never again be wasted on behalf of the Turk, that the vote of our Government, the vote of England, in the parliament of Europe, shall be given in favour of justice and freedom to Christian and Moslem alike, and that the Ottoman power shall be left hereafter to the fate which Providence has decreed to corruption, tyranny, and wrong.

XIX.

BIRMINGHAM, DECEMBER 4, 1876.

[On this day a meeting of the Liberal party was held in the Town Hall, to consider the foreign policy of the Government. Mr. Bright made this the occasion for delivering his annual address to his constituents, in company with his colleagues, Messrs. Muntz and Chamberlain. The contemporary allusions in the address refer to the Guildhall speech of the Prime Minister, and to the mission of Lord Salisbury to Constantinople.]

I HOPE we all feel that we are met to-night under circumstances of some anxiety, and even it may be of some public danger. There are great authorities, authorities to be found amongst leading public men, and authorities in the public press, who tell us that we are, for some cause not at all fully explained, upon the brink of that calamity which men call war. Some of these authorities beseech us not to say much about it. They tell us that ill-advised words may precipitate the danger. We must speak only in a whisper, if we speak at all. They remind me of the advice that is given by their guides to climbers amidst the snowy solitudes of the Alps. They are told not to speak above a whisper, or the avalanche of snow that is above them may descend and overwhelm, not them alone, but the village that lies in apparent security far below. And now, we are advised to leave everything in the hands of her Majesty's Government, who will take care, first of all, and above all, if they can,

of the peace of Europe, and, what is of not less consequence, of the interests of this kingdom.

I sometimes have thought during the past year that her Majesty's Government were rather too much in favour of peace. They are in favour of peace, if not at any price, at least at a price which some of us would scarcely wish to pay for it. They are willing to sacrifice the interests, the happiness, and the freedom of millions of the Christian population of the Turkish provinces, and I am afraid they would make another great sacrifice, they would sacrifice the fair fame and the honour of this country in binding us in perpetual partnership with the worst and the foulest Government known upon the earth. But if our Government is so much for peace, what is to be said of other Governments? All the other Governments are also for peace. At this moment we have no subject of dispute with the United States of America. The justice and the magnanimity of this country have settled every question of difference between our Free Colonies of America and the mother country. If we come to Europe, we find that we have no quarrel with our next neighbour, the French nation. From the year 1860, when the great commercial treaty was negotiated, we have had a constantly diminishing feeling of antagonism to France, and at this moment there exists between the French people and the English people a more durable friendship than we have known in any former period in the history of the two nations. And if you will allow me to give you in one sentence one fact, you will see how great is the importance of that treaty to which I have referred. You have seen to-day in the newspapers a letter addressed by the Chamber of Commerce of Manchester to the Chambers of Commerce of France, and from that letter you will find that, whereas, before the treaty, the imports from France into this country were only 13,000,000*l.* sterling per annum, they now amount to over 46,000,000*l.* sterling, and that the exports from this country

to France, which before the treaty were only 9,000,000*l.*, amount now to 27,000,000*l.* It is this increased trade and communication which have been so advantageous in promoting friendship between the French and the English peoples. I was saying what is the state of things with France, and I have no doubt if you go to the other countries of Europe, to Italy, to Germany, and to Austria, you will find the most perfectly friendly feeling to this country; and, if we go to Russia, we know that only lately the Ministers have told us how friendly were our relations even with that nation, and we have within the past fortnight a declaration from the lips of the Emperor of Russia which shows, at least, that he is as anxious to be friends with us as we are to be friends with him.

I ask you, again, how comes it, if our Government is so deeply anxious for peace, and if all the other Governments of Europe are equally anxious for it, that we are met here to-night under the apprehension that we may be on the brink of war? Let us for a moment consider that question. The difficulty has arisen, as you know, from differences between the Turk—when I mention the Turk I mean the Government at Constantinople—differences between the Turk and the victims, or the children of the victims, of four centuries of oppression in the Turkish European provinces; and afterwards between Russia and Turkey, because Russia sympathises with the Christian population of those provinces. You know that the Christians of those provinces are mainly of the same Church and the same faith with the Russians. The Russians are nearer, much nearer them than we are. They sympathise with them; they have sympathised with them for generations; and when those Christians rise in revolt it is contrary to human nature that the people of Russia should not sympathise with those of their co-religionists who are suffering from the oppression of centuries. We are afraid of what Russia may do to the Turk on behalf of those Christians, and we back the Turks in opposition to the supposed designs of Russia.

Before the Crimean War, which very many of you remember, the Government of Russia had power under treaties to keep a watchful guard over the condition of those Christian provinces, and to remonstrate, if any injury was done to them, or if oppression beyond a certain point was committed upon them. After the Crimean War Russia was no longer permitted to have that power, and it was supposed to have been transferred to the great Powers of Europe. But, in point of fact, it was not transferred to anybody. If you would allow me to read to you one of the clauses of the Treaty of 1856, which has not been near so much commented upon as it ought to have been in the public press, you will see that we struck down Russia as protector of the Christians in Turkey, but we put nobody in the place of Russia, and from that time to this there has been no protection whatsoever offered to that unhappy population. Now in the Treaty is this clause:—

'Clause 9: His Imperial Majesty the Sultan, having in his constant solicitude for the welfare of his subjects issued a firman (that is, a decree), which, while ameliorating their condition without distinction of religion or race, records his generous intentions towards the Christian population of his empire, and, wishing to give a further proof of his sentiments in that respect, has resolved to communicate to the contracting parties (that is, the other European Powers) the said firman emanating spontaneously from his sovereign will.'

And then the Treaty goes on to say the contracting Powers recognise the high value of this communication. It is clearly understood that it cannot in any case give to the said Powers the right to interfere, either collectively or separately, in the relations of his Majesty the Sultan with his subjects, nor in the internal administration of his empire; and, therefore, Russia being put aside by the force of that war, and nobody being put in the place of Russia, you will see that there has been no one to take cognisance of the oppression of these unfortunate populations, and no one to remonstrate with the Porte and to insist upon better behaviour towards them.

Then comes the insurrection, spreading from one province to another; then comes the excited sympathy of the Russian people; then comes the fear of England that something is about to be done unpleasant to its ally and its great friend, the Turk; and then comes the difficulty in which we find ourselves. We are not to be supposed to enter into war, or to be in any danger of it, with regard to any Power except Russia, and with regard to Russia only on this ground, that Russia insists that henceforth, in spite of the Treaty of 1856, in spite of the supposed interests of England, the Christian populations shall have a friend. And if the concerted and united Powers of Europe will not be that friend, then Russia itself will undertake the guardianship of these people, as it has done before.

But now, why is it that we are so alarmed about Russia, because you know Russia is a long way from us? By the Black Sea, from here, Russia is, I suppose, at a distance of full 3,000 miles. Why should we be so anxious about Russia, and why so much alarmed about Turkey? That is a point on which I would wish especially to speak to you. Probably all of you have not examined the map of these countries; but many of you know that the capital of Turkey, Constantinople, stands on the shores or banks of a strait called the Bosphorus, and that the Bosphorus is a narrow passage which leads from the Black Sea into a small sea called the Sea of Marmora, and then another strait called the Dardanelles leads from the Sea of Marmora into the Mediterranean. Constantinople, standing upon that narrow strait has the power if it choose, and if it had forts and guns sufficient and people sufficient to man them, to command those straits, and the Russian navy, the Russian ships of war, although they are now free in the Black Sea, and Russia may have as many as she chooses there, as England may have as many as she chooses in her seas, the Russian navy is not allowed to pass those straits in order to enter the Mediterranean. That

is just the point upon which all this difficulty arises. England imagines that some great danger will happen to her, that she will lose her predominance in the Mediterranean, so that her route to India may be molested, if Russian ships of war should come through those straits, and, therefore, England is anxious to maintain Turkey in its present position, that of holding the keys of those straits and forbidding any portion of the Russian navy from passing through the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Now you see that England—I speak now of England as it has been, and England as represented by the present Administration—that England is afraid that if the Turk went out the Russian would come in, and therefore we are driven to this dreadful alternative, that we must support the Turk, with all his crimes and with all his cruelty, and we must support too, as we do practically support, the Mahometan religion throughout the whole of that portion of the world.

About 700 years ago the people of this country, as history tells us, joined the Crusaders, and went to Palestine for the purpose of liberating the Holy Places from the possession of the infidel and the Mahometan. And now what do we do? We give the blood and the treasure of England to support this Turkish Government. We give Bethlehem, Olivet, and Calvary, to the Turk. We condemn to perpetual ruin those vast regions which have become a wilderness and a desert under the Turkish sceptre. We do all this for this simple purpose, to prevent Russia passing any ships of war from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. Now that was the policy which brought about the Crimean War in 1854. I will not tell you the cost of that war: you have heard it often. There is, however, one point of its cost that I observe has not recently been referred to, except in one or two papers; but let every working man remember, and he can remember, if he is old enough, that, whilst a loaf of a given size was worth 4*d.* in the year 1852, before the war, and before the probability of war,

during the two years of the war it rose to sevenpence farthing or more. Your supplies from Russia were, of course, cut off, and your bread was scarce and dear. Now do not let it be charged upon me that I am asking you to shrink from some public duty because your bread will be dearer. But when you are counting the cost and deliberating what has been done and what should be done in the future, I say that you are bound to take into consideration all the price that you are called upon to pay for any given policy that may be suggested to you.

Next comes the consideration of the failure in the results of the war. Nobody, I believe, now is of opinion that Turkey was permanently strengthened by it. Her decay has proceeded constantly and rapidly. We occasionally see unhappy men who are afflicted with what is called a creeping paralysis, a malady which seizes a foot or hand, which resists all the power of medicine and treatment, which gradually extends itself, laying hold of more and more of the body, until at last the end of this terrible malady comes by the death of the patient. Turkey has been suffering from creeping paralysis for a century past, and during the last twenty years the mortal disease has made rapid progress. There is only one part in which it does not affect the strength of Turkey, and that is its power to oppress and to do evil. I say the policy of the war of 1854, looked back upon from this time, was a policy of misfortune and of error; and I should like to ask you whether you conceive that it would be consistent with wisdom and justice, or only with ignorance and panic or presumption, that we should turn back to that policy, accept it as if were good, and re-establish it in the acts of England and our Government in the year 1876.

Now let us examine for a moment the root whence this policy grows. I observed the other day—some day, I think, only last week—a paragraph in a leading article of the *Times*,

which I should like to read to you. There have been others of the same kind, but this just occurred to me. It appeared on November 30. The *Times* says: 'The interest we take in the integrity of the Ottoman Empire has its origin and end in our desire that the balance of power in South-eastern Europe should not be disarranged.' Now, it is supposed, if Russia had ships of war in the Black Sea, as she has, and if they were free to pass into the Mediterranean, as they might but for the closing of the Straits, that Russia would be more powerful in the Mediterranean (which, of course, she would; nobody denies that), and that there would be another naval power added to those whose ships are now found in that sea. If the Black Sea fleet came into the Mediterranean it would be one fleet more in the Mediterranean. That is simple and clear. At present Spain has ships of war in the Mediterranean. France has a fleet there, and whenever she likes she has a great naval fleet at Toulon, as you know. Italy has a fleet there; she is building now a very powerful, and to my mind a needless ironclad, with a gun that is called a 100-ton gun, which is to fire a shot of nearly a ton weight. I say nothing of the wisdom or folly of such ventures; but Italy has a fleet in the Mediterranean; Austria has ships of war there; Turkey has her ships of war there. I ask what would happen—would the sky fall, or would the British flag be lowered or dishonoured, if even half-a-dozen, or ten, or two, or three, as the case might be, Russian ships of war were permitted freely to navigate those straits, not straits made by Turkey, or made by England, but made by nature, and intended, of course, to be a passage open to all the world between those two great seas, the Mediterranean and the Black Seas? It is a very curious thing, but it is worth considering as a fact, that we who live here, so far off, and who have the biggest fleet in the world—a rather bigger fleet, I believe, than all the rest of Europe put together—are the only alarmists in this matter. Nobody cares about it

except the English Government; no people have the smallest interest in it except the English people; and I think it may be shown that they have no real interest in it. Other nations feel no panic about it, and have no idea of going to war to support Turkey for any such purpose as to keep the Russians blockaded in the Black Sea.

You see in the papers—and it is wonderful how well the newspaper writers write about things which they do not understand, or which, if they do understand, they seldom attempt to explain. You see in the newspapers that our route to India is supposed to be greatly concerned in this matter. Our principal route to India now is, as you know, through Egypt. Passengers may go by the railway, or in ships which pass through that wonderful canal which the energy of M. Lesseps and which the money of Frenchmen made. I should like anybody to tell me how the route to India will be interfered with at all. I do not know exactly how many hundred miles it is from Constantinople to the mouth of the canal; but I should think it must be 600 or 700 miles at least. But it is not very far from Toulon, the first French naval port, to the mouth of the Canal, and it is not far from Spezzia, the Italian naval port, and, of course, if the Turkish people were not in a state of decay, the Turks could put in jeopardy our route to India; and it would appear that nobody ought to live, move, or have his being anywhere within that portion of the globe who has the smallest chance of lifting a finger or uttering a word against anything which the English Government may choose to do in the Levant.

There is one way of securing our route to India. This is through an offer that M. Lesseps made to Europe many years ago, that the Canal should be in the possession of the leading Powers of Europe, and should by solemn treaty be kept in first-rate order and always open to the ships of all nations who should choose to pass through it. Instead of England buying shares in the Canal with the idea of its being a route over

which we have some special right, let all the nations of Europe have their interest in it. It would be a bond of union between them, and it might in fact, in time to come, be the cause of a more strict and generous and peaceable union of Europe than we have seen exist at any time in the past. Would the English fleet be any less powerful in the Levant if the Russians could come that way? You know that the Russian fleet can come now from the Baltic round through the English Channel and into the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar. That is a very long route indeed, and is exposed to the perils of the sea, and it is much more likely that they should wish to have, and perfectly, in my mind, just that they should have, their natural right of passage through these Straits, and that these Straits should be open to all the navies of all the nations of the world. There are some persons who now hear me who read newspapers forty years ago. Carry your minds back to the year 1836, and you may remember that at that time a number of people, half-lunatic and half-designing, in this country, got up a panic about the invasion of our northern shores from Russia, from the Baltic, through the Sound; and suggested, I presume, that they had a design of conquering Scotland, and annexing it, no doubt, to the Russian empire. The Baltic is shut up for about half the year by frost. What happened during the Russian War when the English fleet went into the Baltic? The Russian fleet did not go out of it, because it could not; but took shelter behind the fortifications which had been erected at Sveaborg and Cronstadt. They did not come out to meet the English ships, and the English ships did not dare attack them within those formidable defences; and yet forty years ago we were told that we were to have an invasion of this country by Russia, and the Government of that day actually added, on the strength of that panic, 5,000 men to the roll of the British navy. Wherever there is the slightest panic on any matter of this kind, there absurd and

extravagant acts are committed. We can make allowances for children that are afraid in the dark, but for a great nation like this, without doubt in some respects at this moment the most powerful in the world, to be shaken by these childish and unreasoning panics, is a discredit and a humiliation which we have to bear, unfortunately, before the honest but astonished opinion of all other nations.

I have referred to the peculiar position of Turkey and of Constantinople upon the shores of the Bosphorus. Let me ask you now to look at the peculiar position of Russia on the shores of the Baltic. Russia is a country that for its magnitude, for the breadth and length of it as you see it on the map, is more without navigable rivers running to the sea than any other country in the world. Almost all its great rivers run into the Caspian or into the Black Sea, and at present the Black Sea is that one road by which they are not allowed to emerge through the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. If you go to the Baltic you find another great sea, perhaps nearly as big—I do not know whether it is as big or bigger—but another great sea, and the only way out if it is through a very narrow passage, called the Sound, a passage where the Danes until a few years ago levied a toll upon all ships passing. The different nations agreed to pay the Danes a sum of three or four millions to abolish that toll, and to make the passage free. But Russia, as you see, is shut up by frost on the Baltic for half of the year, and when her ships come out they have to come through this narrow passage. Now, I should like to know whether, in that state of things, Russia would perpetually consent, as she is blockaded by frost in the North, to be blockaded by England through the hands of Turkey in the South, and that from no portion of her vast empire should one of her ships be able to pass during half the year on account of the frost, nor any portion of the year from the other at the command of the Government of this country? The thing seems

to me to be intolerable and impossible, and it cannot long be sustained. If we were in that position, what should we do? I have no doubt whatever that there would be a unanimous discovery on the part of all people in England that we had a just claim to go through that natural passage; and, though I for one should be very much in favour of negotiation, I am afraid that not a small minority—perhaps a large majority—of my countrymen would be determined to enforce that claim by such means as came first to their hands.

I have come to this conclusion long ago, and I throw it before this meeting, and before such as may read the proceedings of this meeting, that the Eastern Question, as it is called, is not worth one single farthing to us more than this, that we have an interest in freedom and peace everywhere. It is of no consequence to us as a great political question, except as it affects the admission of Russian ships of war from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. It is not the possession of Constantinople. If you had ever been at Constantinople, you would know that it is not a very formidable power. Constantinople is not a great city on the wheels of caravans that can be brought down to the mouth of the Suez Canal. Constantinople is where it has long been, and where it will long remain. Turkey is not a territory of such a kind as would do us any harm if Russia had any portion of it. There is not an intelligent man in Russia or in Europe who does not know that the accessions of territory to the Russian Empire during the last fifty years have greatly weakened that Empire. At this very moment, when it may be that Russia is about to enter into war with Turkey on this question of the Turkish populations, are we not sensible, if we look at the map, and see the advance of Russia in the direction of the Himalaya mountains and our possessions in India, is it not clear to us that every soldier that she has in all that vast territory—and there are many thousands of them—that every

soldier she has there is so much weakness to her now, when she comes, as she may, unfortunately perhaps, come to have a great and prolonged struggle with the Government at Constantinople? Therefore we have no interest whatever in the question of Constantinople, none whatever in the question of territory. It is supposed we have an interest in the exclusion of Russian ships of war from the Mediterranean, and that is the pith and kernel of the whole thing, the soul of the dispute which is suddenly disturbing the peace of this country.

I shall be told, you know I have been told very often, that things I have said on this platform are not English, and are not patriotic. If I can show—and I am entitled to try to show—that there is nothing in this question which affects the interests of England, as your Government and some of your press would persuade you, I say I can do no more patriotic act on behalf of my countrymen than to save them from these constantly recurring panics, and from the perils which such panics bring with them; because if I can dispel this terror, if I can so strengthen your nerves that you will no longer tremble at this hobgoblin, then I have done my little part towards settling what is called this perilous Eastern Question for ever. I would ask you whether what I suggest is just or reasonable? 'Oh, but,' many men will say, 'we have nothing to do with what is just and reasonable.' I had a pamphlet sent me the other day, evidently from a man who considers himself a great authority, and it stated that it had gone through three editions. It says: 'What you call right, national right, is national force. There is no such thing as national right; it is a question purely of price.' And some man commenting on the speech I made the other day at Llandudno, said it was all very well for a moralist, but it had very little to do with statesmanship. For my part, I have no wish to be a partner in any statesmanship which is dissociated from morals. But I should like to ask you whether, if this thing be just and

reasonable from the view of morality, it is likely that we can sustain the existing state of things? If Turkey has suffered from this advancing paralysis for twenty years past, do you think that she will recover from it in the twenty years to come? Does not every man know that Russia is continously advancing on the path of civilisation? There are glimpses even in that despotic country of the approach of freedom to which Russia has heretofore been unaccustomed, and we may rely upon it that, whilst Turkey is constantly diminishing in force, and Russia is constantly advancing, the time will come —it may be ten years hence, or twenty years hence, and you may have a war now and a war then, but it is written in the book of fate, and no man can reverse it, that these passages will ultimately, and that not remotely, be open to all the nations of the world.

And now let me ask you what other nations think of our conduct in this matter. At this moment we have no promise of assistance in any course we take that leads to war from our next neighbours, the French. In 1854 France went into the war with Russia along with this country, not because France cared one farthing about the question, but Louis Napoleon thought it was of great interest to his dynasty to associate himself with England in a great political transaction in Europe. At this moment—well, I ought to have said I do not know whether at this moment, for I see it is announced to-day that there is a resignation of the French Ministry, but I speak of it as if it still existed—at this moment France has—at least it is to my mind—the most intelligent and the most honourable Government that I have known since I have been accustomed to study French affairs. At the head of the Republic is a man in whom all men trust, and that is a great thing for the head of a State. I will not draw any comparisons between the head of the French Republic and the head of the Administration in this country. Our true head of the State, I need not say, is as trustworthy as the head of

the French Republic, or as the head of any Government or State of which we have any record in history. But the Duc Decazes, the French Foreign Minister, since he has been in office, has conducted his department with a moderation, a wisdom, and a sense of justice, I think, which could not be excelled. But the French Government will take no part with us in the pretensions which we may make about this great question. Italy in 1854—then the kingdom of Sardinia—it was before a united Italy existed—Italy went into that same war with us; but why? For a reason—I will not say that it was a sound one, and I will not say that it was not something which, to many minds, was justified by its results; but I heard from the lips of Count Cavour, who was then minister of the Sardinian kingdom, that they went into that war because it was greatly to their interest to associate themselves with England and France, from whom they expected in the future some corresponding advantages. Germany, as you know from the papers of the last day or two, is neutral in this matter. We are one of the historic allies and friends of Germany. Germany is Protestant as we are, and that has something to do with our sympathy with Germany; and, though we are all, I hope, in favour of as much religious freedom as we can get, and as we can bear, still I believe that the fact of the Protestantism of Germany makes the alliance between England and Germany more likely and more permanently secure. Then there is Austria. Austria has great difficulties of her own. I have a great sympathy with Austria, because for some years past she has made rapid and remarkable strides in improved and constitutional government. But Austria has no intention whatsoever of going into this war on the grounds whereon we have been supposed to be likely to go into it. The fact is they have no interest in our pretensions, and they do not feel sympathy with our demands, and what I shall call our presumption, with regard to the mediation. They have no interest in a perpetual blockade

of Russia in the Black Sea; they have no interest in dooming vast regions under Turkish rule to a perpetual desolation, and I believe they have none whatever in the question now disturbing Europe that would induce them to go to war. Now, I believe our true interest is no greater than theirs, and we have only to examine this question, to take the map of Europe, to look at the Black Sea, to look at the position of Constantinople, to look at the mouth of the Canal, to look at the state of the Baltic, to see how many fleets there are already in the Mediterranean, and that the addition of one small fleet more can make very little difference; and under these circumstances we shall come to the conclusion that we have no interest whatsoever in the turmoil that has been created, and that, unless we can in conjunction with Russia urge upon Turkey such reforms as are necessary, our duty is to stand aside, and to leave the neighbouring nations, and Turkey and Russia especially, to do whatever seems possible, and whatever they may think best to do.

I do not in any case, as you know, stand forward as a defender of those sanguinary struggles which continually, or at times, take place amongst the nations; but I know not how in some cases they are to be avoided. There can be no arbitration unless the parties to the dispute are willing. There can be no arbitration between such a Government as that which reigns at Constantinople and the suffering people of whom we have lately heard so much. I only take consolation in the fact, viewing all these tremendous scenes and frightful sufferings—

> 'That God from evil still educes good;
> Sublime events are rushing to their birth.
> Lo! tyrants by their victims are withstood,
> And freedom's seed still grows, though steeped in blood.'

Let us hope, let us pray, that the efforts that are being made,

efforts that I believe are being made as sincerely by the Emperor of Russia as by the Government of this country—let us hope that those efforts may be crowned with success, and that the storm which has been created and which threatens to rage around us may be put an end to, and that tranquillity may again speedily prevail. Our Government has sent a special messenger to Constantinople. Lord Salisbury is a man of whom a good deal may be said against, and a good deal might honestly be said in his favour. Perhaps that is true of most of us. But, with regard to his policy at home, I think I have observed in it for many years—and I have watched him and sat with him for many years in the House of Commons—what I should call a haughty unwisdom that is unfortunate and mischievous. On the other hand—I have seen in his conduct as Minister for India a great liberality and disposition to do that which he believes to be just. I can only hope that he leaves his unwisdom for home consumption, and that when he arrives in Constantinople his liberality, justice, and his strong intellect will have fair play, and I hope he will do his country the highest service and himself the highest honour by the duty he has undertaken.

But the special ambassador has been to Paris, to Berlin, to Vienna, and to Rome. He has seen the Duc Decazes; he has seen Prince Bismarck; he has seen Count Andrassy; he has seen Signor Melegara at Rome; and they have heard what he has to say. If he has been seeking for allies and sympathisers, I suspect by this time he knows that he has failed to find them. If he will act upon his own strong sense he may do us great good. If he acts as the subservient representative of his chief—judging his chief by his own language—then I think he may do us a very serious ill. Conferences are not always certain to lead to peace. In 1853, before the Crimean War, there was a Conference at Vienna held in August, and the Powers assembled were England,

France, Austria, and Prussia, to settle the dispute between Russia and Turkey, and they agreed to a note, to an award, to a piece of advice, which became historic and celebrated as the Vienna Note. That Vienna Note was sent to Russia, and the Emperor accepted it pure and simple. It was sent to Turkey, and the Turk refused it. It was said, and said I believe most untruly, that the Emperor accepted the Note in a sense not intended by those who had drawn it. Well, our Cabinet at that time contained no less than five members who had filled the office of Foreign Secretary, and others who ought to be well acquainted with diplomatic language of that kind; and what happened after all? Turkey had been so inflated and so excited by the fact that two big brothers, France and England, were ready to come to her assistance, that Turkey declared war against Russia, and then England and France went into the war fighting on the side of the Turk, who had rejected their advice and award, and against the Emperor of Russia, who had distinctly and simply accepted it.—A Conference, then, does not mean certainly peace —I wish it did; but if the Conference be not absolutely to be relied upon, what have we to rely upon?

We have two things that are very important to consider, and they are the only two other points to which I will ask your attention for a few moments. England, in this matter has no ally. She had France and Sardinia in 1854, and, of course, the Turk; and now, if she went to war with Russia, of course Turkey would be our ally. But we have no other ally, and I do not see, myself, how England can carry on a Continental war without an ally. We have been to France; but France says 'no.' We have been to Italy, and Italy says 'no.' We have been to Germany and to Austria, and they say 'no.' Our cause, in their eyes, is not so just and so important, or it is not one in which they have so great an interest as to induce them to lend us their sympathy or to give us their support. Therefore, I look upon it that boasting

at the Guildhall of how many campaigns we can bear before we are exhausted, before the working men of England are in the condition that they were in during the great wars in past times—all that sort of boasting is greatly out of place. The Prime Minister may be a great actor; but it seems to me that he plays always for the galleries. But we have something better to rely on than this, and that is on the better knowledge of our people. The policy of 1854, as I have described it, is the policy of the Government now—a policy which would lead us into war on behalf of Turkey and against the Empire of Russia. We have had experience. Shall we profit by it or not?

I think I once quoted in this hall, or in some public speech, a passage from the writings of an eminent Frenchman, historian, and statesman, the late M. Guizot, which is worth remembering. He says: 'The people who can understand and act upon the counsel which God has given it in the past events of its history is safe in the most dangerous crisis of its fate.' Well, are we not now full of the experience of the war of 1854? If it were necessary, I could quote authorities, one after another, who are strongly in favour of the view which I am taking. The late Lord Aberdeen was Prime Minister when that war was undertaken, and to the last hour of his life probably there was no one event of his life which he so greatly regretted. Sir James Graham, one of the most capable men in that Ministry, First Lord of the Admiralty during that war, said to me in the most frank manner, 'You were entirely right, and we were entirely wrong.' I might quote you the opinions, in his later years, of Lord John Russell, who was a member of that Government, and who, in writing since, has endeavoured to show how impolitic that war was, and how it might have been avoided. I might quote Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, who was the minister at Constantinople at that time, and who himself then, unless he is very much belied, held with

enthusiasm for the Turk. You have read some of his letters, probably, in the *Times*, during the last few months. You see how he entirely gives up the whole of the policy which he supported at that time. I might take you to the opinion of one whose opinion the more I reflect upon it, the more I value it, the opinion of my lamented friend, Mr. Cobden. You know that he was at one with me in our objection to that war. But if you want to know how he came to that opinion, how he argued it, what reason he had for it, I must commend you to turn back to two of the remarkable pamphlets which he wrote and published about forty years ago. In a pamphlet which he published in 1835, entitled 'England, Ireland, and America,' there is this passage. He says: 'We have no hesitation in avowing it as our deliberate conviction, that not merely Great Britain, but the entire civilised world, will have reason to congratulate themselves the moment when that territory (that is, Turkey in Europe) again falls beneath the sceptre of any other European Power. Whatever ages must elapse before this, this favoured region will become, as it is by nature designed to become, the seat and centre of commerce, civilisation, and true religion. But the first step towards this consummation must be to convert Constantinople again into that which every lover of humanity and peace longs to behold it, the capital of a Christian people.' I have been so impressed during the last few weeks by reading over again those pamphlets—pamphlets published when Mr. Cobden was unknown to the public, when he was carrying on his business in Manchester, when he was only thirty or thirty-two years of age—pamphlets which I will venture to say have nothing to surpass them in the whole political pamphlet literature of this country—I have been so impressed with them that I have taken steps along with some of my friends, to have the one published in 1836, entitled 'Russia, Turkey, and England,' reprinted, and I believe in the course of some day this week it will be offered for sale, probably, at all the

railway bookstalls and at every other shop which has customers likely to require it. If I may advise the people of England, now with an experience of forty years, and with the experience of the war in the Crimea, I cannot point to anything in the whole of our political history that will be so healthful and useful for them to read as the pamphlets to which I have referred.

One other appeal I must make to you. In this country—thanks to what our forefathers have done, and thanks to some things which we have done—we enjoy a large measure of freedom: there is room for it to grow and become still larger; but it is large, and we enjoy it, and I trust we are thankful for it. We are also, as I have aforetime said, in some sense the mother of free nations. We have planted great nations, free as ourselves, on the Continent of America, where they have grown and become great; we have planted them in Australia, and they are gradually becoming great; we are planting them in South Africa. Our language, which has become the language of freedom in all the world, is gradually making its way amongst all the educated classes in India, and the time will come, and I trust it is not very remote, when there may be some kind of free institutions established in that country. The lovers of freedom everywhere look to us, the oppressed everywhere turn their eyes to us and ask for sympathy and wish for help. They feel that they may make this claim upon us, and we, a free people, not only do not deny it, but we freely acknowledge it. Well, I put to you a solemn question, a question which you must answer to heaven, and to your children, and to your posterity. Shall England, shall the might of England again be put forth to sustain so foul a tyranny as that which rules in Constantinople? a tyranny which is drying up realms to deserts, a tyranny which throughout all its wide range of influence has blasted for centuries past with its withering breath all that is lovely and beautiful in nature and all that is noble and

exalted in man. I ask you, Mr. Chairman, I ask this meeting of my fellow-countrymen, I ask every man in the three kingdoms—and in this case I need not ask woman—what shall be the answer given to this question? And I dare undertake to say there can be only one unanimous answer from the generous heart of the English people.

XX.

ROCHDALE, JANUARY 2, 1877.

[On this day, Mr. Bright having been invited to be present at the Anniversary of the Rochdale Working Men's Club, and to deliver them an address, consented to do so. It was a peculiarity of this Club that it was entirely self-supporting, and independent of the patronage of richer persons. Mr. Bright took occasion to show what had been the material progress of the country during the thirty years preceding the time of his address.]

I KNOW not how to thank you for the kindness with which you have greeted me. It shows that the gentlemen who waited upon me two or three weeks ago to invite me to this meeting did not mislead me. They said it was many years—I am told that it is ten years at least—since I was permitted to speak in public before my fellow-townsmen, and that they thought it would give pleasure to the members of the club, and to others who might attend this meeting, if I were to be present at it, and take part in its proceedings. I presume they were not mistaken in that. I have received a greeting which is the more pleasant to me because it comes from those I have known longest, and it is one which I am not likely to forget.

Our Chairman has entered a little into the details of the institution on whose account we are assembled to-night. The members of the committee who called upon me gave me much information with regard to the Workmen's Club.

They convinced me that the object they had in view was undoubtedly good. They showed me that the attractions which the club offered to its members were innocent attractions; they showed me, also, that the associations connected with it are such as do not corrupt, and that amusement and instruction are blended in such a manner as to make the club very pleasant to those who are members of it. They informed me, further, that they had, or were gradually accumulating something of a library; that they had a fair supply of newspapers; that they had occasionally, indeed frequently, lectures in their largest room; and that they had also discussions carried on with great freedom and great charity, such as were likely to greatly aid in promoting the knowledge of affairs and developing intelligence amongst the members of the club; and they referred to that point to which our Chairman has referred—that they had attempted to establish an institution which, whilst it did not absolutely banish intoxicating liquors from it, is so arranged that it is free from the most—what shall I call it?—the most dangerous of the temptations which are to be found in public-houses.

I daresay you have heard something of a system of public-houses which exists in Sweden, and especially in the town of Gothenburg. My honourable friend and colleague, Mr. Chamberlain, one of the members for Birmingham, in an admirable speech a few weeks ago, explained that system. He has visited Sweden, has seen it in operation, and could tell us and did tell us much that was worth hearing about it. But the Gothenburg system is good in this particular especially, that the persons who manage the public-houses have no interest in promoting the sale of intoxicating liquor, and that therefore they do not encourage those who attend the houses to drink; and the man who goes in and drinks a glass of water, or a cup of coffee or tea, or drinks nothing at all, is just as welcome as the man who drinks a great deal of

what is intoxicating; and the result is supposed to be, and really is, that men drink very much less in those houses than they are accustomed to drink in public-houses, where the landlord has the greatest interest in promoting the sale of his liquors, and in having customers who drink as much as they can carry away with them.

But when the committee called upon me they referred to another point, and in a letter which Mr. Glaisher, who has read the report, wrote to me a week ago, he referred to it as one of great importance. He said that this club has an advantage which the Gothenburg system has not. It has what the Gothenburg has, but it has something more. It does not urge its members to drink, it is glad when they do not drink. The manager or steward has no interest in their drinking what will intoxicate. But beyond that there is another force in favour of temperance, and that is the public opinion of the club. All the members of this club are not known to each other, but a great number of them are known to each other. They meet here on some night or nights in the week, and the club becomes an association, a sort of family. There is an opinion amongst its members, and it follows that the more respectable, the less disposed to drink, the people who are highest in culture and character amongst them, necessarily influence the opinion and practice of the rest; and thus there grows up in the club an opinion which makes drinking degrading and odious, and suggests moderation and temperance in all men.

You know what opinion does amongst us all. Whatever we are that is good we owe in great measure to the opinion of those with whom we associate. There was a time in this country when men used to kill each other in duels. The slightest quarrel might happen between me and some one on this platform at this meeting—a foolish or a hot word might have led to-morrow morning to an encounter which might have been fatal to one or both of the parties. But now all

that—which was a general practice sixty to a hundred years ago—is absolutely abolished, and a man would be considered little better than a murderer who proposed to go out into the next field and shoot the man who, only the day before yesterday, was his friend, because of some hot word that had been uttered in conversation. Public opinion has put down duelling. Public opinion perhaps may put down intemperance. I hope the public opinion of the club may have this effect: That it may gradually convince all the members of the club that the club would be infinitely better if nobody got drunk, if nobody ever took drink, if all its members were moderate in the highest degree, or abstinent in the highest degree; and that this opinion may grow and may do that which the Gothenburg system is not competent to do, although it may do great good; it will bring to bear the force of public opinion, which is often more powerful than law, and change the habits, the low and degrading habits, which I am sorry to say are not absolutely unfrequent amongst any class of our population in regard to the consumption of intoxicating drinks. I myself, as many here know, am not in the habit of using these liquors at all. But I am not in favour, any more than our Chairman, of a law which shall say that no man shall partake of any of these articles. I believe there are things which legislation can do —first of all, to keep much better order in public-houses than is now kept; and, secondly, to lessen the temptations which are offered, not to working-men alone, but to all men, to take more drink than they ought to take, and sink into habits of infoxication and vice. Even when all that legislation can do is done, I would rely upon reason and experience for carrying the reform still further. I believe, so far as I can understand the working of this club, that it tends in that direction; and therefore I think that I am not out of place in being here to-night to say a few words in its behalf.

I was told a fact which I did not observe in the report—

that the average consumption of spirits, wine, and beer in this club per week by the members who attend is about 3*d.* or 3½*d.* per individual. It occurred to me when I went through the club-house, and I have thought of it since, that if the members of the club could diminish that average by one half, and still more, if at some future time they could abolish it altogether, and make the cost of it a contribution to the service of the club, they could have a house twice or three times as large, ten times more convenient and agreeable, and infinitely more likely to do great service to the thousand, and I hope then possibly it might be the two thousand, members of which it might be composed. I mention this, not as finding fault in the least, but merely throwing it out to the members of the club as a suggestion as to what may be done to extend their operations, to give greater influence to their association, and to make the club not only a great source of good but a real honour to the town with which we are connected.

Now we will go away from the club for a time. I am not come here for the purpose of lecturing you or preaching to you. I agree very much with an observation that I met with the other day in a lecture by Mr. Ruskin—that there is a good deal of the patronising style practised when men come forward to address any of the labouring classes, or the workmen, such as are members of this club. I should like to read you an extract from one of his lectures to explain what I mean. Mr. Ruskin is a great critic. He is a man who writes beautifully; he says a great many things that are worth being remembered, and I must say—I hope he will forgive me—he says a great many things that ought to be forgotten. Well, Mr. Ruskin on a subject like this says:—

'Nothing appears to me at once more ludicrous and more melancholy than the way people in the present day talk about the morals of labourers. You hardly ever address the working-man upon his prospects in life without quietly assuming that he is to possess at starting, as a small moral capital to begin with, the virtue of Socrates, the philosophy of Plato, and the heroism of Epaminondas.'

Now, these were amongst the very greatest of the men of ancient Greece, and I think anybody who expects that is a little unfair. He says:—

'Be assured, my good man, you say to him, if you work steadily for ten hours a-day all your life long, and if you drink nothing but water, or the very mildest beer, and live on very plain food, and never lose your temper, and go to church every Sunday, and always remain content in that position which Providence has placed you, and never grumble nor swear, and always keep your clothes decent, and rise early, and use every opportunity of improving yourself, you will get on very well, and you will never come to the parish.'

I shall not follow the methods which Mr. Ruskin so amusingly condemns. What I am here for to-night is rather to enter into counsel with you than to lecture or to preach to you, and I want to speak to you on points about which working-men are very often forgetful.

Many of them—the younger generation no doubt—are very ignorant about the change in the working-man's condition during the generation with which I have been connected, I mean during the last forty years. I venture to say that there can scarcely be anything more worth while a working-man's examining and comprehending than the change which has taken place in the condition of his class. When you speak of a working-man, you mean of course a man who is accustomed regularly to some useful employment or work. To be a man at all he must have food, and to be a healthy man one would say that it was necessary he should have a free market for the purchase of his food. To be a working-man he must have materials with which to work, and it would seem reasonable that he should have a free market for the purchase of materials. More than that, as far as possible, he should have a free market for the sale of his materials. A great many people in this country—I hope a diminishing number—think that because other countries do not allow us to send our goods into their market free of duty, therefore we should not allow them to send their goods to this market free of duty. They think two bad things are

better than one. They remind me very much of what it would be if a man had got a sound box on one side of his head and he was to go about complaining that nobody gave him another sound box on the other side.

Now, we will go back for a period which I remember very well, and which many in this meeting must remember. We will go back to the year 1840. At that time there was great distress in the country. The duties upon goods coming into this country were almost beyond counting. I believe there were at least 1,200 articles on which, by the law of England, taxes were levied when the goods came into Liverpool, or London, or Hull, or Glasgow, or any other of the ports of the kingdom. Everything was taxed, and everything was limited and restricted. Even bread, the common food of the people, was taxed, almost more highly than anything else. Now, you may imagine—nay, you cannot imagine—but you may try to imagine in what kind of fetters all our industry was chained at that time. And you may try to imagine, but now in this day you cannot imagine, what was the amount of pauperism, suffering, and abject misery perpetually prevailing among the great body of the working-classes in the United Kingdom.

I shall only refer to two articles, and from them you may learn what was the state of things with regard to others. I shall ask your attention to two articles only, those of corn and sugar. Up to the year 1846, that is, just thirty years ago—everybody who is fifty years of age ought to remember all about it very well—up to 1846 corn was in reality prohibited from coming to this country from abroad, until our own prices had risen so high by reason of a deficient harvest that people began to complain and began to starve, and it was let in at these very high prices in order in some degree to mitigate starvation, and to make famine less unsafe. Now, what was the quantity of corn which came in last year? I mean in the year ending last September. It was some-

thing perfectly astounding. It is very difficult to make anybody understand what I am going to say—but you know what is meant in workshop language by a fifty-six, a weight which takes a strong person to lift, and two of which take a very strong man to lift. Two of these weights are one cwt. Well, last year, between September, 1875, and September, 1876, there came to the ports of this country for the consumption of the people of the United Kingdom 118,000,000 cwts. of articles of food, which were mainly prohibited under the law as it existed up to 1846. That amount in cwts. comes to 29,000,000 of quarters. These are some of the particulars of it. Wheat alone, 53,000,000 cwt.; flour, 6,000,000 cwt.; Indian corn, 34,000,000 cwt.; barley, 8,000,000 cwt.; oats, 11,000,000 cwt.; peas 1,500,000 cwt.; altogether 118,000,000 cwt., or 29,000,000 quarters. This is a quantity of which we can have no kind of conception. It is like telling us how far it is to the sun. We cannot form any notion of it. Now, you must remember—it will not want much argument to show you—that at that time, 40 years ago, markets were badly supplied and prices were very high. People that were well off had their tables as well furnished as now. Their loaf never dwindled and became less. They were always well fed, plump in the cheeks, living many of them sufficiently and most of them luxuriously. The suffering was amongst the wages class. Misery most abject, a permanent condition of starvation, all the consequences of this dreadful system, pressed with more and more weight as it came more and more down to the very humblest and very poorest of the people. Well, what was it all done for? It was done under the pretence that it was necessary for the protection of all our great agricultural interests. They did not say much about the rents of landlords, because the landlords had passed the law, but the landlords' rents were the first consideration. The second was the prosperity of the farmers. These Corn Laws were necessary in order that

they might be able to pay good rents. And sometimes they even ventured to speak about the agricultural labourer, although it was well known then and is well known now that the agricultural labourer, under the influence of this law, was in the most miserable condition of any of the various classes of labourers into which the working-class population of the country can be divided.

But that law destroyed your trade. You could not receive corn from abroad, and your foreign customers, therefore, could not buy from you, and whilst it raised the price of your food it diminished the demand for your labour, and, as a matter of course, lessened the wages you received for your labour. Now I venture to say here—and one may say it thirty years after the event; one may now say things which would have been probably hurtful to the feelings of some of those who supported that law—in my opinion there is not on the record of any other people at any time, much less of any civilised and professedly Christian people, so astounding a crime against the security of the Government itself, and against the population it was called upon to rule, as the Corn Law of 1815, passed by the Imperial Parliament of this country. If you could turn back to a year of abundant harvests and low prices, like 1836, and then turn to the years 1840 and 1841, when the harvests had been bad, and when food was dear, you would find three things that would appal you. First of all, that as prices were rising, as the harvest failed, pauperism throughout the whole of the country—amongst the manufacturing population, amongst the farm-labourers—was constantly and steadily increasing, and not only that, but that crime, and every kind of crime, was increasing just about at the same rate.

It was in these times that Ebenezer Elliott, the Sheffield poet—the Corn-law Rhymer—wrote his burning and scathing condemnation of this law. Many of you here are no doubt weavers employed in the cotton or woollen trade of this town,

and have read the touching lines in which he is showing how the Corn Law is striking here and there almost everybody, blasting his prosperity and his hopes, and condemning him and his family to daily suffering. He turns at last to the weaver, and he says:—

> 'Bread-taxed weaver, all may see
> What that tax hath done for thee,
> And thy children vilely led,
> Singing hymns for shameful bread,
> Till the stones of every street
> Know their little naked feet.'

And then looking upon the growth of crime, the conspiracies that were constantly afloat, the insurrections which were looked towards by people as a relief, he then addresses the ancient monarchy of his country. He says:—

> 'What shall bread tax do for thee
> Venerable monarchy?
> Dreams of evil spare my sight;
> Let that horror rest in night.'

He knew, and everybody knew who comprehended the character and operation of that law, that if it should continue to afflict the people as it did through thirty years of its existence, there was no institution in this country, not even its venerable monarchy, that could stand the strain that that law would bring to bear upon it. But there was another fact shown by the figures of that time—that not only pauperism increased, and crime increased, but mortality increased. Strong men and women were stricken down by the law, but the aged and little children were its constant and most numerous victims. I recollect, in one of those fine speeches which the late Mr. Fox—I mean Mr. Fox who for many years, as you recollect, and not long ago, was one of the representatives of the neighbouring town of Oldham—I recollect an observation, or a passage in a speech of Mr. Fox, spoken, I think, from the boards of Covent Garden Theatre, at one

of our great meetings, where he said, referring to the mortality among the people, and the death-rate rapidly increasing when the harvest failed, and when foreign food was prohibited, 'The Corn Law is the harvest of Death as well as of the landowner, and Monopoly says to Corruption, "Thou art my brother."'

Under the Government of Sir Robert Peel, in 1846, the law was repealed, and three years afterwards—in 1849—all the duties on these articles were taken off, except a shilling per quarter, which has been more recently abolished. Since this happened there has been no fall of rents throughout the kingdom. In point of fact the prosperity of the country has been so increased that the rent of land throughout the country is now higher than it was when that Corn Law was in existence, and the farmers, who were always complaining during the existence of that law, have scarcely ever been heard to complain in the least since it was abolished. They complained for a year or two because they had been greatly frightened, but there has never been, I will say, within the last hundred years a period when the farmers of this country have made less complaint to the public or to Parliament than they have during the last thirty years since the law for their protection was abolished. And what happened to the labourer? The wages of farm-labourers have risen on the whole much more, I believe, than fifty per cent. throughout the whole country; and in some counties and districts, I believe, the farm-labourer at this moment is receiving double the wages he was when this law was in existence. We ought to learn from this what a grand thing it is to establish our laws upon a basis of freedom and justice. It blesses him who gives and him who takes. It has blessed all our manufacturing districts with a steadiness of employment and an abundance they never knew before, and it has blessed not less the very class who in their dark error and blindness thought that they could have

profited by that which was so unjust, so cruel to the bulk of their countrymen.

Now we will just turn for a moment to the article of sugar —these are the great articles of consumption, and therefore I deal with them. The sugar that supplied this country up to a period a little after that when the Corn Laws were abolished came mainly from the West Indies. A good deal came from the East Indies, but I will refer now chiefly to the West Indian colonies, Jamaica, Barbadoes, Antigua, and others. A little before that time, between forty and fifty years ago, the planters of the West Indies were in a very peculiar condition. In the first place they cultivated the sugar-cane by slave labour; they therefore stole the labour by which they grew their crops. No doubt they kept their negroes barely alive, but they paid no wages as we are accustomed to consider wages. But they were not satisfied with stealing the labour with which they grew their crops. They asked the Parliament of this country to give them almost the exclusive use of the English market, so that they might sell their sugar here at a price much higher than they could get in any of the other markets of the world. And many of these planters being people of importance and influence in this country and associated with our land proprietors, and our land proprietors being in the same boat with regard to bread, of course it was only natural that they should be as kind to the West Indian planters at our expense as they had been to themselves; and thus, in addition to the curse of a corn monopoly, you had the curse, a diminished, but still a curse, of a monopoly of sugar. What was the result? I will take the year 1840. In that year this country imported from abroad 4,000,000 cwt. of sugar, which cost 9,000,000*l.* Now what do we import? Last year—I mean the year ended in September—we imported 16,000,000 cwt., that is four times the quantity we imported in 1840. But what did it cost? It did not cost four times as much as in 1840. It

did not cost half as much, but instead of costing 9,000,000*l.*, as the 4,000,000 cwt. did, it cost 17,000,000*l.* If the sugar we imported last year had been imported at the same price, the monopoly price, as in 1840, the 16,000,000 cwt. would have cost us 36,000,000*l.* instead of the 17,000,000*l.* which it actually did cost. You see, therefore, that the abolition of the protection upon sugar has just had the same effect in degree that it had upon corn. The quantity imported has been enormously increased, and the price has been to an extraordinary degree diminished.

There are many ladies in this meeting who know—and I dare say there are a great many husbands who know, too, as much about these things as their wives—that sugar has lately risen within the last few months, but till then it has been about as cheap as flour. I recollect, at a meeting held in Surrey during our agitation thirty years ago, that a gentleman stood up and made a speech. He was a stranger. He stated that he was well acquainted with sugar-growing in various parts of the world, and said, 'If you abolish the protection on sugar, sugar will be as cheap as turnips.' It has not, I believe, been as cheap as turnips, but it has been so cheap that it must have added greatly to the comfort of families, and to the ease with which many other things, fruit and so on, are made palatable, especially to children in families. But what has been the effect, with regard to this sugar question, to those people whose protection we took away? The colonies have been on the whole more prosperous since than they were before. We never have any petitions to Parliament now stating what distress the planters in the colonies are in—freedom has had just the same effect with regard to sugar that it had with regard to corn. It has blessed us in our families in furnishing this great article of food at a moderate and reasonable price. I believe it has not been of the smallest evil to the bulk of the population in the sugar-growing colonies.

Now having done with the question of imports, I must

just ask you to look at this matter from another side. You all of you know that if 118,000,000 cwt. of grain of one kind and another, and if 16,000,000 cwt. of raw sugar—for I have not dealt with refined sugar, and there is a large quantity of that—if all these quantities come into this country—they are coming now from many parts all over the world—somebody must pay for them. You buy your sugar in the shop, and the shopkeeper buys it from the wholesale dealer in London or Liverpool, and he brings it from abroad, and payment is made in the articles which the industrious and intelligent workmen of England make, which find employment for all your mills and manufactories of every kind. What they make is sent out abroad to pay for those articles. What must necessarily be the result? That there must be an enormously increased demand for the labour of the workmen; and there has been that demand as you all know. I recollect the time very well when every Monday morning there would be from ten to twenty men and women coming to any factory in this neighbourhood, and asking if there was a place open for them, and wanting to be employed. That sort of thing has been entirely changed. I wish that weaver were living now who, when before a Parliamentary Commitee, some forty years ago, said he always noticed that if there were two men running after one master, wages always seemed as if they were inclined to go down; but when there were two masters running after one man, he always noticed that wages were inclined to go up. That was a sensible weaver, an observant weaver; but there were many men in both Houses of Parliament forty years ago who did not understand so very simple a proposition as that; and it took about seven years' lecturing and preaching and arguing before we could get it into their—I will say their very dull heads. But now if you look all over the country, I think you will see, all of you—I mean every man of fifty years of age, and every woman of that age, will see—that there has been a great improvement

in the condition of what I call the wages class, the class of persons who get their wages every week or fortnight for a week or a fortnight's work.

There is a book published in Liverpool, an almanack, called the 'Financial Reform Almanack.' Its price is one shilling. How it can be sold at that price is a marvel. I believe there is no other book published in this country which will give you so much information with regard to imports and exports, to consumption, to everything that we use, taxation, expenditure of taxes, matters of Government, pensions, and so forth. I believe there is no other publication in the country that is to be compared with the 'Financial Reform Almanack;' and every honest man who wants an honest Government ought to have that book somewhere near, so that he can apply to it when he wants information on any of these questions; and I do not know how to express my admiration of the industry and the accuracy with which Mr. M'Queen, who is, I think, the secretary of the association, has compiled this remarkable book. Two or three figures, taken from this book, will tell you what I mean with regard to the changed condition of the people. I go back to 1840, and compare it with 1875. In 1840—I will take the article of bacon; bacon was not allowed to come in in those days at all. Now the 32,000,000 or 33,000,000 of people in the United Kingdom consume, not of home-grown bacon, but of bacon that is imported, more than 8 lbs. weight per individual, that is, an advance of 8 lbs. from nothing at all. The consumption of butter has increased from 1 lb. to 5 lbs. for each individual; of cheese, from 1 lb. to 5½ lbs.; of potatoes from nothing to 16 lbs.; of rice from 1 lb. to 11 lbs.; of tea, from 1¼ lb. to 4½ lbs.; of sugar, from 15 lbs. per head to 53 lbs. per head; of wheat flour, from 42 lbs. per head—and I believe the year 1840 was a year of considerable importation because the prices were high—it has risen from 42 lbs. in 1840 to 197 lbs. per head in 1875. All this has been brought about with-

out any violence, without wronging anybody. There is not a human being in England who has a loaf less or a pound of sugar less, or any of these things less by what has been done. There was no violence, no insurrection, no bloodshed, no disorder, the people have merely become more intelligent, Parliament more intelligent, and statesmen more intelligent; and all this has been done by merely tearing up two or three foolish Acts of Parliament, and allowing people their natural freedom to buy and sell where they could buy and sell to the greatest advantage.

Forty years ago people were all talking about emigration. Why do not the people emigrate? people asked. There were societies for promoting emigration. I read only two or three days ago an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, a review of the life of the late Canon Kingsley, and I found he said that thirty or forty years ago all thoughtful people were appalled at the state of the country. They thought something was going to happen, the state of the country was so bad. The people suffered so much, they were so discontented, that there would before long be a great catastrophe, like a general insurrection or revolution; and people said, why cannot millions go to a country where there is room for them? The people have emigrated, of course, as an active-minded people like this always will emigrate. But emigration has not made this great change. People are far more numerous in the country now than they were then, and yet for all that, they are much better off, there is much greater demand for labour, and the rate of wages in every branch of labour is higher than it was at that time.

I will leave this question of tariffs, and duties, and protection, and free trade, and ask the attention of the members of the Workmen's Club to one or two other points, in order to show the change in their condition. Look at what has taken place in this country with regard to the means of education and the possibility of rearing your children to be intelligent young men and women as compared with what

existed at the time to which I have referred. Now nearly everybody has a newspaper if he chooses to have it. I was very much amused some two months ago when I was down at the town of Kelso, in Scotland. It was one of the days when everybody was expecting news from Constantinople. I went into the market square of Kelso with a friend of mine, with whom I was staying, and we called at a shop to get a copy of the *Scotsman* newspaper, and I said, 'I never saw such a sight as this before.' There was this large square, quite a large space, and all round it there were groups of men, three or four or five or six, standing together, and somebody in each group reading a paper. The paper was there at hand for everybody who wished to read it and who wished to learn. That is a change which has taken place merely by a change of law. At the time I have been speaking of, the paper upon which a newspaper was printed had a heavy excise duty upon it. As soon as the paper went to the *Observer* office, or the *Manchester Examiner*, or the *Manchester Guardian* office it had to go on to a Government office and have a stamp placed on each paper, and every stamp was charged *4d.* Then when advertisements were put in, the unfortunate newspaper proprietor had to pay *3s. 6d.* for every advertisement. The charge for advertisements was afterwards reduced to *1s. 6d.*, and subsequently the duty was abolished; and now it happens that you can get a newspaper every day for a halfpenny or a penny. Take the *Evening News* published in Manchester, or the *Manchester Examiner*, or the *Manchester Guardian*, or your paper here, the *Observer*. Every paper of that sort cost *7d.* then; now it costs *½d.*, or *1d.* at the most. These taxes were not levied for the sake of bringing money into the public Exchequer. They were put on mostly during the reign of Queen Anne, and the object was to limit the number of newspapers, to strangle them, to prevent the people having political information and expressing their political views. And those taxes re-

mained until a few years ago, when the last of them was abolished.

And now what an excellent machine, what an admirable thing a good newspaper is! Your newspapers are larger than those—infinitely better; there are ten in the country for every one there was then; and what do they tell you? Everything. They are not for rich men only. The rich man gives a penny for his paper or 3*d.* for the *Times*, which after all is probably quite as cheap as any of the others from some peculiarities of information with which it furnishes the public; but the rich man can get no more out of his newspaper than one of you who pays a penny for it. What do you get? If you read within the last day or two what did you see? In Canada there is a strike of the engine drivers on the Grand Trunk Railway—they are no wiser in Canada, it appears, than they are here. If you cross the frontier to the United States, you see an account of the most appalling accident that has ever happened since railways were made, and you see a great discussion about the election of President. If you go a little further south, you read about the division that exists in that unfortunate country of Mexico. If you cross the ocean and go to Australia, you hear that they are discussing the price of wool, and whether one of the colonies shall continue its system of protection, or adopt the system of free trade established in another. If you cross the ocean to the Cape of Good Hope (we see all this in the papers we buy for a penny), you see, not all the discussions, but what is sufficient for you, that are going on with the attempt to make a confederation of the South African Colonies. Then you go to India, and even this very day—Socrates, and Plato, and Epaminondas, and all the ancient Greeks and ancient Romans had never dreamt of such a thing as you see to-day in your newspapers—the account of the grand ceremony which took place yesterday at Delhi, in Northern India, the proclamation made that the Queen of England was henceforth the Empress

of her Indian dominions. Then if you go overland to Egypt you read of something which is not pleasant about the Egyptian debt. And then you go to Constantinople, and you hear there that affairs are in a very critical position, and you hear, what I am very glad to see and believe, that the policy of our Government is more in accordance with the policy indicated by the public opinion of this country than it was some time ago. We must always bear this in mind, that the policy with which our Government began their proceedings was supposed at that time to be the policy of the nation. It was the policy of 1856 and of the Crimean War. It was a policy which I was not able to coincide with, and which I always condemned very much, as you know. The Government began that policy and they adhered to it, I think, some time longer perhaps than after they ought to have abandoned it. I trust now they have adopted a course more in accordance with the opinions, and, I believe, with the true interests of this country, than the past policy of England with regard to Turkey. But, if you leave Constantinople—which I see it is very difficult for you to leave—you read that the English fleet has gone from Besika Bay to the Piræus, which is a port of Greece. You read that the Italians, with nobody likely to attack them, are foolishly making 100-ton guns. If you go to Paris you see discussions that are going on between their Senate and their Chamber of Deputies, that is to say, between their House of Lords and their House of Commons, as to who shall have the absolute control of the public purse. And all this you see every day in your newspaper, so far as the editor can do it, accurately and truthfully given, and all this in addition to the information, sometimes amusing, often instructive, often grievous and afflicting, of all that transpires in your own country. All this is brought before you every morning, beautifully printed, and for a price that when you have had it every morning for a week costs you no more than a single quart of very poor beer.

But, then, the newspapers are only one element of instruction. Look at what has been done with regard to schools. The bill of 1870 was a great measure, deficient in many parts, which, from its deficiency and incompleteness, has been the cause of much dissension in the country. But still it was a great measure, and the future of it will be great. What happens now every year with respect to education? In the parliamentary grants no less than 2,500,000*l.* a-year are voted for the school system of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Parliament, therefore, is anxious that the whole population of the country should be educated, and it will be the fault of the parents of this generation if the next generation is not much advanced beyond what we are in the education and culture which children shall receive.

I might tell you what science has done. You travel now at the same rate as a royal duke. There are third-class carriages by every train on some of the principal railways. I do not mean to say that nobody but workmen go in third-class carriages, because I recollect a story of a rich man in this neighbourhood, who being asked why he travelled third class said, 'For a very good reason—because there is no fourth class.' Turn now to the Post Office. You write a letter, and put a penny stamp upon it. You receive a letter, and your correspondent has put a penny stamp on it. I recollect paying to the post-mistress in Rochdale, when Mrs. Lee was post-mistress, a long time ago—and she was not always very polite, I remember, when she was in a hurry—paying no less than 25*s.* for the postage of a single letter from Leghorn, in Italy. The postage on such a letter now would be 2½*d.*, or perhaps it might be 5*d.*, as the letter had many inclosures. Look at your telegraphs. By post and telegraph every workman has opportunities and advantages which our forefathers never dreamt of. You can inquire whether work is scarce or abundant, whether there is reason to move to this town or to that. These scientific improve-

ments are of great service to all classes, and they are of more service to the workman than the workmen themselves have fully understood.

There is only one other point to which I shall refer as to changes in the law, and that is with regard to the extension of the borough franchise. You know what a terrible thing it was in prospect, how many people said we were going to Americanise our institutions. They did not know what that meant, but they used the phrase, and what harm has happened? They said that property would not be safe, and how everybody would overturn everybody else. And what has happened? The most conspicuous fact throughout the country is, that there is universal content in all the borough population among those to whom the franchise had been extended. At this moment there are no conspiracies. Your workmen's club is not a political club to get up some movement against the law or the monarchy. There is nothing of that kind now. In time past, even those very persons who were so much afraid of us did not hold their property and their privileges by so secure a tenure as they have held them since the passing of the law. Nay, the monarch of these realms, popular as she has always been; popular as she has always deserved to be; still, I will undertake to say of her, I say it without hesitation, and without fear of contradiction, that there were times within the last thirty years, and since she came to the throne, when there was a great deal less of an honest and true loyalty than is to be found in this country at the present time.

And you have not only got the franchise, but you have got the ballot to secure you from any compulsion with regard to its exercise. I recollect a peer, whose name you would know very well if I were to mention it, who went about in a state of almost mental agony, saying, 'If this Ballot Bill be passed the whole influence of property will be gone.' But what has happened? The influence of property, so far as it

is a just influence, exists now, and is exercised now, and any exercise which it had before the Ballot was conferred was an exercise that it ought not to have had, and was a tyranny over all those upon whom it was exercised.

But I want to tell the working-men of this workman's club what some of them do not—at least what some workmen do not appear altogether to appreciate or comprehend—that they are now the full citizens of a free country, and that on them a great responsibility is devolved. Is it not a grand history, that of the last forty years? Are not the changes such as all of us may be proud of, that they have been effected with so little, in fact with no disturbance? You cannot point, probably, to a revolution of violence in any country of late times where there has been so much done of permanent good, in the same period, as has been done for the people of this country by the wise changes in our law. And yet, I dare say, history will not say very much of these changes. The fact is, history busies itself with other matters. It will tell our children, I dare say, of conquests in India, of annexation, it may be in the Punjaub, of Chinese wars—wars which were as discreditable to us as they have been unprofitable. It will tell your children of the destruction of Sebastopol, and perhaps it may tell them that everything for which Sebastopol was destroyed has been surrendered, or is being now surrendered, by an English minister at Constantinople. But of all these changes which have saved the nation from anarchy, and an English monarchy from ruin, history will probably say but little. Blood shines more upon her pages, and the grand and noiseless triumphs of peace and of wise and just legislation too often find but scanty memorial from her hands.

But now there may be those who will put this question to me. Some of my critics to-morrow or the day after will say, What has this to do with working-men's clubs? Why talk politics to a meeting which is understood not to be a political meeting? I have not been talking politics.

These questions which I have been discussing were politics a few years ago when the contest was raging round us whether they should be settled justly or not. Now they are not politics, they are not matters of controversy, they are matters of history, and I am treating you to a chapter of history. But then they will say, Why tell us the old story, and go back to the Corn Law and the Sugar monopoly? They will say I wanted to glorify myself before my fellow-townsmen because I had taken a humble part, with hundreds of thousands of others, in carrying these measures. No, I tell you the old story because there are many in this room who are too young to have known much about it, and it is a great and salutary lesson for the members of the workmen's club, and for workmen everywhere to have spoken and read to them. It tells them of freedom, and how freedom was won, and what freedom has done for them, and it points the way to other paths of freedom which yet lie open before them.

The workman of England now is no longer a human machine, minding a spindle or a loom, or working at the bench, or at the forge, or in the mine. He is not a man only to make goods for export, but he is a man into whom, by these changes, has been infused a new life, and to whom is given a new and a wholesome responsibility. Every voting working-man in England is now a ruler of men, and a joint ruler of many nations, and it is worth while for the working-men of England to look their responsibility in the face. There are some further things which a wise legislature may do for them, but the main thing to be done for them must be done by themselves. There are many teachers and many plans. Some say that co-operation will save everybody. Well, co-operation in this town has been, I believe, of remarkable advantage to those who have been concerned in it. Co-operation in joint-stock companies affords an easy mode for the investment of savings, and is, therefore,

a very advantageous though new institution amongst us. Some think that trade unions will set everything right. I am of opinion that trade unions may be useful if they will not depart from sound economic principles, and if they will not interfere with the individual freedom of their members or the freedom of those who have the employment of capital. I recollect last year, or perhaps it was the year before last, in some observations I made at Birmingham, I pointed to the fact that there is no class of persons whose wages have risen more in the last twenty years than the class of domestic servants, and amongst domestic servants there are no trade unions, no committees, no orators to expound their interests and maintain their cause. A great leader in trade unions set himself to answer me, and what was his answer? He said the case of the woman servant is easily explained. It is explained by the vast emigration of young women to foreign countries, seeking there a better livelihood than they could get here. They have diminished the supply and wages have risen. He seemed to have forgotten that there have been three times as many men who have emigrated as women, and if the trade unions to raise wages were not necessary for the women, certainly upon his own argument they could not be necessary for the men. No, the great rise of wages has come from the causes I have indicated, and if they have come from any other cause, by limiting the number of persons to work in a particular trade, and by controlling, and unreasonably controlling, as it has sometimes been, their employers, then that rise of wages is not just, and is not permanently advantageous to the whole people. It may be for a time advantageous to the particular class by whom it is enforced.

I conclude what I have to say with only one other point, and that is on the question of education. I believe that workmen have need to be taught, to have it pointed out to them, how much their own family comfort and the success and happiness of their children depends on this—that they

should do all they can do to give their children such education as is in their power. One of the American States is the State of Massachusetts, and it is probably the most educated and intellectual. It has a system of general education. Massachusetts was founded about 250 years ago. From that time to this it has had a system—a very extended system—of public schools. Eight generations of its population have had the advantage of being educated in these schools. The men who were driven from this country by the tyranny of monarch and archbishop founded this school system—the men of whom the poet I have already quoted speaks in these terms, describing them as—

> The Fathers of New England who unbound
> In wild Columbia Europe's double chain.

Meaning the chain of a despotic monarchy and of a despotic and persecuting Church. Suppose we had had in this country all that time schools for the education of your children, to what a position this country would have risen by this time!

I want to ask working-men to do their utmost to support the school system. Be it a school belonging to a sect, or be it a school belonging to the School Board; if it be a convenient or a possible school for your children, take care that your children go to school, so that Parliament in voting 2,500,000*l.* for purposes of education—2,500,000*l.* to which you subscribe by the taxes—shall have the cordial and the enthusiastic support of the people in forwarding education to the greatest possible degree in their power. Depend upon it, if you support the school the school will compensate you. You know I dare say, a passage, which is one of the many striking passages which you may find in the writings of Shakspere—where he says, speaking of children that are rebellious and troublesome—

> 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is,
> To have a thankless child.'

I ask working-men, and I might ask it of every class to a certain extent, how much of the unhappiness of families, how much of the grief and gloom which often overshadow the later years of parents come from what I may call the rebellion of children against their parents' authority, and against the moral law. If you will send your children to school, encourage them in their learning, make them feel that this is a great thing for them to possess, the generation to come will be much superior to the generations that have passed, and those who come after us will see that prospering, of which we can only look forward to see the beginnings in the efforts which are now being made. And more than this, besides making your families happier, besides doing so much for the success of your children in life, you will also produce this great result, that you will do much to build up the fabric of the greatness and the glory of your country upon the sure foundation of an intelligent and a Christian people.

XXI.

BIRMINGHAM, JUNE 1, 1877.

[On this day Mr. Gladstone visited Birmingham at the invitation of Mr. Chamberlain and the Liberals of the Borough, and delivered a series of addresses on public topics. In the evening he was entertained by the Mayor of the town at the Queen's Hotel. The following address was made by Mr. Bright in response to the toast of the Borough members.]

I FEEL that I have no new phrases in which to tender you my thanks for this most friendly reception. It is now nearly twenty years since I was elected as one of your representatives. I was then absent from your borough and had been for some time, from bad health, in a state of seclusion. I need not return thanks, I think, for Mr. Chamberlain, because he is here. I may say of our colleague, Mr. Muntz, that I met him in London yesterday, and that he expressed to me his regret that he could not be here on account of a family gathering of very peculiar interest at which he was expected, and that he trusted that the kindness of the Mayor and those who would be present to-night would accept that as a sufficient apology for his absence.

It seems to me that in Birmingham there is a certain strong appetite for stirring times. The great complaint of Mr. Chamberlain is that nobody is active enough for him; and no doubt next week, after the great week which you have experienced here, and which is just about coming to a close, I am afraid he will be looking forward keenly to some further political excitement. Mr. Chamberlain looks through

his eyeglass as if he was only waiting till I should resume my seat, and then he will be able to answer this charge which I have brought against him. But after all you have had a great week in Birmingham, a week which will be remembered by all your now existing population, probably to the very end of their lives. You have had among you the most eminent man of the statesmen of our country in this generation—the most eminent man certainly that we have in Parliament or have had for a very long period. You have had the greatest meeting that has ever been held—I believe the greatest political meeting within our time under any one roof, and you have had what all the world will say is a great speech upon a great and solemn question. You have received that speech as it deserved, and now a million copies of it will at least have been circulated throughout the homes of the people of the United Kingdom. And when men speak and their words go the following day multiplied a million times to the homes of all the people, it becomes them that they should speak with caution, and say only that which honestly they believe and can affirm.

I should be glad if I could forget that I was at one time hissed and hooted by mobs, and forget, further, a story that I was burnt in effigy by those I was most anxious to serve; and, finally, that in consequence of the course I took on a great public question I lost my seat in Parliament for one of the first constituencies of the kingdom. But I may recollect that, after all, I never lost the sense, and I have not lost it yet, that I did what was my duty to my country under the trying and difficult circumstances in which I was placed. There has been a great change in all these years—a most extraordinary change; but a change, perhaps, that was inevitable from the disappointments which followed the policy of twenty-three years ago, and which found expression—a complete expression—when the horrors that have recently been enacted in the Christian Provinces of

Turkey became only practically known to the people of England. I think it may be said that if all do not actually condemn the policy of 1854, perhaps I may say that almost all do actually and deeply deplore it. For myself, I was then active in a contest against an overwhelming tide of public opinion. Now, I can afford to be, and think, perhaps, I ought to be, tranquil and in some degree a spectator, for I see the policy that I approve is successful and triumphant now.

I turn for a moment to what is a much pleasanter thing for me to speak upon, and that is the effort which is about to be made to improve the organization of the Liberal party throughout the country from the example which has been set by the constituency of Birmingham. In 1868, at the General Election, the Liberal party had a majority of nearly or about a hundred; but a few years afterwards, in 1874, the Liberal party were defeated by a large majority. How did this happen? There are many modes of accounting for it, but I believe one chief mode is this—that the majority was obtained in the first election after the passing of the Household Suffrage Bill; that there was a general belief that hereafter the Tory party was swept pretty much from the board and from the field; that a Liberal majority was permanently secured, and that it was not henceforth necessary to take all the measures which had formerly been taken for supporting the organization of the power of the Liberal party in the various borough constituencies of the kingdom; and the organization fell into decay. Then, there came upon that, as you know, the combination of a very large class engaged in a particular trade in the boroughs. You have 2,000 of them, I think, in Birmingham alone. Two thousand give 2,000 votes, and there can be no doubt that that combination was of such a nature that not only those votes were secured, all, or nearly all, for one party, but that every man connected with that combination had the power, and as a body they exercised the power, of inducing persons who were their constant customers

and attendants at their houses to give their votes in the same direction, and the consequence has been that in nearly all—in a great number of the boroughs in which the majorities had not been large, this combination of Trades Unionists—nothing more, nothing better, revolting against a law which the moral sense of the country believed to be necessary, that combination had such an effect as to change the representation in a very considerable number of boroughs.

Then there were some others, I forget how many, but at least a dozen, in which the Liberal party were divided, and were running like hounds after two or three hares at a time, that brought forward more candidates than there were vacancies; for the party was divided, and at least a dozen seats were transferred from our side to that of our opponents, and by these means the change occurred which caused a change of government and brought about that state of inaction of which Mr. Chamberlain so much complains.

I do not believe so much in that inaction, and I do not believe so much in what may be called the loss of political feeling. Has there been no political feeling here during all the time, and has there been none exhibited here this last week, and was there no political feeling exhibited during the whole of last autumn? And if there be a great question brought forward before the people you may rely upon it that the Liberal party is not only not dead, but it is not very sick, and you will find it will soon be again restored to robust health. Now, I wonder, looking back over the period to which Mr. Gladstone has referred, I wonder that anything good ever is done and anything liberal in the Parliament of this country, because the Parliament is not a better Parliament than most Parliaments that exist, when you consider what are the constituent elements of the Conservative party in this country and of the Conservative power. You know that nearly all the land—three-fourths of all the land, I dare say in the United Kingdom is held by probably a smaller

number of men than were addressed by Mr. Gladstone last night. Well, but of all this land three-fourths of it, at least, is constantly and steadily in a position to act on behalf of the Conservative party. And, what of the Church? If you have 20,000 educated men, with comfortable stipends, settled in all the parishes of the country in alliance with the land, you know what influence they can have, and you know that the influence of the clergy in as great a proportion as the influence of the land is steadily exerted against all the measures and against the principles of the Liberal party. Now, seeing you have also the military service, persons who live upon the taxes and revenue of the country, and a great proportion of the professions, because you will find—I have found, at any rate—that the bulk of the lawyers, and I am sorry to say, as far as my experience goes, the bulk of the doctors inclined very much rather to their rich than to their poor patrons—you will see that the power of property and the power of social position—all this is constantly ready to support the Conservative party. If it has plenty of friends, it needs no canvassing, it is always ready at the poll; and I say that it is absolutely a wonder that the Liberal party in this country has been able to achieve the success and the triumphs which have marked its career during the last forty years of our lives.

Well, then, you come to this new scheme which has been propounded in Birmingham of an organization throughout the country. The question is, is it practicable? It is not so practicable in every borough as in Birmingham, for you have such a predominance of Liberal opinion here that it seems when you undertake a great measure of this kind as if your whole population went with you. But if you come to other boroughs it is different, but still I believe there are many, and, perhaps, I may say that in all the boroughs some organization of this kind may be most beneficial and to a large extent most effectual. I trust that the example which

has been set by this constituency may be followed generally—nay, universally—by all the populous boroughs of the kingdom, and I think if it is so you will find a great and a good result. You will stimulate, if you do nothing more, watchfulness and activity. You do not put forward a programme of Liberal opinion. For my part, I am not much in favour of programmes. Depend upon it, the way to successful political action is not by having a great catalogue of either principles or Bills. The course of events always shows what are the measures upon which the public mind is running, and Ministers and members of Parliament are moved as the public is moved. All the questions which ought to come first do come first, and nothing can prevent them from coming first, and it is not necessary to give us a catalogue of political professions and policy for the future.

Well, then, you have no programme; it is a very good thing, for you do not intend to dictate in the slightest degree to any constituency which may be in this confederation what kind of men they should choose for their candidates, nor what shall be the political principles held by the candidates or the pledges they shall be required to give. What you want to do is to stimulate watchfulness and activity, and intelligent and wise interest in the politics of the country. There are questions which are coming very soon, and on which I might say a word to the gentlemen here connected with this confederation, of which my hon. colleague has been elected chairman, that the attention of the confederation should be turned to the counties. They have had no legislation, no freedom; they have not been dealt with as the boroughs have been dealt with; to use an ordinary expression, they have been left out in the cold. Those who are looking anywhere are looking to us who have delivered ourselves from the tyranny of the past to hold out our hand and offer to deliver them also. Your county franchise is in a miserable condition. The great bulk of your countrymen, respectable

as any in Birmingham, who walk about the villages and little towns, have no more votes than if they lived in Russia. I am not quite sure whether they have as much political freedom. All that must be put an end to. We do not want to usurp all the political power in the boroughs. We want the counties to have their share and to co-operate with us in doing what is for the good of the entire population.

My first knowledge of Birmingham was of the meetings on Newhall-hill. I was not there except in spirit. I was young then, and I suppose some people would say foolish. If so, I was foolish in a folly that has lasted now for more than forty years. But I know that at that time such was the excitement in my father's house that we began to take in the *Evening Mail*, I think it was—that was an issue of the *Times* newspaper three days in the week. We had never dreamt of taking more than a weekly paper. Up to that time we took the *Manchester Guardian*, price 7*d.*, published on Saturdays only. Well, the *Evening Mail* at that time had magnificent articles, which I am told some people connected with the *Times* have since regretted. I read those articles to my father and family in the evening. They were very stirring articles. They gave me much information, and I date some portion of my political activity to the influence of that paper in those days. And I read there of your great meeting, and all the country read of it, and all the country was stirred to its very heart by what you did at that time. And what was done was that the greatest measure that the English Parliament has ever known was passed.

Many years afterwards I was permitted to come here as one of your representatives, and what have you done? Was there ever such a series of meetings, so great, so unanimous, held during the last twenty years as have been held in your Town-hall? To the best of my knowledge you have always appealed to the constituencies and the country and asked all to come forward and demand that the franchise should

be extended and freedom offered to the whole population. And this measure was one which a great many of those who at last undertook to pass it had said would be absolutely destructive of all that constitutes the greatness of the country. The measure became law without any convulsion at all; and those who passed it, and whom I count our opponents, have an idea that they are in power in virtue of that law. If that be so, they cannot be very angry if we ask them to extend the provisions of the law.

This week Birmingham is maintaining its ancient character. There is no town in England at this moment that occupies so great and so proud, and at the same time so responsible a position as your town. You are foremost in good works, and have been for many years past. Your Town-hall is consecrated to freedom, but your Town-hall is now not one quarter large enough for all those who would come to listen to a great speech on behalf of freedom. You now call upon your sister cities and towns throughout the kingdom to come forward and to join you in a great association, in order that the opinion in England which is in favour of freedom may act with full force by its full development; and I say, then, that we have a right to hope that from this centre and heart of the country, as you are geographically and as you are politically—I say from this centre and heart of the country there should go forth light and warmth and heat, which should be seen and felt in every borough in the kingdom. And if it be so, and if you get the answer which I anticipate from those sister cities and towns, there is no measure that is good and noble, nothing that is a measure of freedom and justice that you may not carry; and you from this centre may influence as you have heretofore influenced the administration and the legislation that touches every portion of the great Empire of which we form a part.

XXII.

BRADFORD, JULY 25, 1877.

[An American citizen, Mr. G. H. Booth, who had been for many years a partner in a firm of Bradford merchants, expressed a desire, on retiring from business and returning to his own country, to present a statue of Richard Cobden to the town of Bradford. He did not indeed survive long enough to carry out his purpose in person, but entrusted the execution of his plan to his partners. The statue, which was the work of Mr. Butler, was set up in the town, and was entrusted to the care of the Bradford Exchange. Mr. Bright was requested to perform the ceremony of unveiling the statue, and on this occasion delivered the following address.]

I MUST first express my thanks to Mr. Behrens and to the gentlemen of the Chamber of Commerce for the address which they have passed, and which has been presented to me. I only wish I had any claim to such an appreciation; but I have the satisfaction of knowing that in some small degree I have endeavoured to promote objects which are applauded in the address, and I will not complain if my friends have taken too favourable a view of what I have done.

We are assembled here this morning to partake or to engage in a ceremony which must be of importance to many of you, and which to me has a very special interest. We are met to do honour to the memory of a man whom I will not hesitate to describe as one of the best and the noblest

Englishmen of our time. Some poet, whose name I do not remember, has asked,

> 'Why need we monuments supply
> To rescue what can never die?'

And I may say for myself that I have not been one of those who are eager to promote the erection of statues and monuments, for I have believed that there are few men so conspicuous as to deserve them, and those who deserve them most certainly require them least. But still we have before us on this occasion what may be held to be the outward and visible sign of something that men have admired and of some qualities which have been highly attractive to them; and the sight of a statue like this promotes inquiries and causes answers, and leads men to consider the qualities of the man to whom the statue is raised; and therefore I take it for granted that it must in many cases be advantageous and instructive to those who were not acquainted with the distinguished individual who is represented before us.

I have been asked, I presume, to take part, and the most prominent part, in this morning's ceremony because of my long and intimate friendship and my intimate personal relations with Mr. Cobden, which lasted, unbroken and undisturbed by a single jar of any kind, during the long period of twenty-five years. When Mr. Illingworth and Mr. Wade called upon me, and asked me to undertake this office, I felt, and I have felt ever since, that there were two difficulties in my way—first of all that I could make no speech to you which would be adequate to the occasion; and secondly, I felt that in saying what I should be obliged to say of my friend who is gone, I might run the risk in some cases of appearing to speak in terms of praise even of myself as having been connected with him in much of his work. However, I will pass over that, and hope that you will judge me lightly if any such thought should cross any of your minds.

I come to speak for a little while of my lamented friend. You know, probably, that Mr. Cobden was not what in the world's language is called high-born; that he did not enter upon life with what are called great connections; that he was not surrounded by the appliances of wealth; that it could not be said of him that 'Fortune came smiling to his youth and wooed it,' for he was born, if not in a humble, at least in a very moderate, farm-house, and of a respectable and quiet and honourable family in the county of Sussex. Of his school-days I shall say only this, that I suppose he had no better opportunity of education in the school to which he went than almost all boys of similar age throughout the whole of Great Britain have now. He had no opportunity of attending ancient Universities, and availing himself of their advantages, and—I am afraid I might say—in some degree, perhaps, of suffering from some of the disadvantages from which those Universities are not free. When he entered into life—I mean after he left his parents' home—he had no high patronage to see that his path was cleared before him. He came to London. He held a situation in an office and warehouse, I think in Watling Street, and he entered immediately into the pursuits of business, we may be sure with alacrity and with intelligence. From Watling Street, by an accident, it became his duty to come down to the North of England, as the agent of the house of business in which he was; and in the North of England his observant and intelligent eye discovered very soon that in Yorkshire or Lancashire—but especially in Lancashire, with which he became more familiar—there was a field where, by certain qualities which he felt that he possessed, he would be able to make his way, and be enabled to prosper.

He settled in Manchester when he was only twenty-six years of age, about the year 1830. His business was that of a calico-printer. He had an excellent taste in design and in colour. He had all the qualities, then, of a good man of

business — industry, intelligence, sagacity, probity of the highest kind—and, therefore, it is not to be wondered at that his success was great and rapid. But then he had a mind that was expansive and sympathetic, and he could not be content with his ledgers and his business and his profits, but his heart went out at once to the great population amongst whom he lived. He looked around him and he saw their condition and their wants, and the first great public question to which he turned his mind, as far as I am able to gather, was the question of public and national education; and I know the first time that I became acquainted with him was in connection with that question. But he not only had this sympathy in regard to what he deemed necessary for the instruction of the people, but he found that their interests were greatly affected by what he thought an unwise foreign policy on the part of the Government and the country, and so early as 1834 or 1835 he published a pamphlet under the title of 'England, Ireland, and America'—a pamphlet, I venture to say, of such sagacity and foresight that it has probably never been excelled by any essay on politics in modern times. In this pamphlet he dealt at considerable length with the question of Russia and the question of Turkey, because at that time great efforts were being made by some persons to create and to excite jealousy on the part of England against the people of Russia and the Russian Government—efforts which have not ceased even to the day in which I am speaking.

I said that the first time I became acquainted with him was in connection with the subject of education. I went over to Manchester to call upon him to ask him if he would be kind enough to come to Rochdale and to speak at an education meeting which was about to be held in the School-room of the Baptist Chapel, in West Street of that town. I found him in his office in Mosley Street. I introduced myself to him. I told him what I wanted. His countenance

lit up with pleasure to find that there were others that were working in this question, and he, without hesitation, agreed to come. He came and he spoke; and though he was then so young as a speaker, yet the qualities of his speech were such as remained with him so long as he was able to speak at all—clearness, logic, a conversational eloquence, a persuasiveness which, when conjoined with the absolute truth which there was in his eye and in his countenance—a persuasiveness which it was almost impossible to resist. Well, not long after this, there came up the question of the Corn Law, for the skies had lowered and the harvests were bad. In 1838 there was a considerable movement in Manchester, partly made by some private individuals, and partly and most importantly by the Chamber of Commerce, and an Anti-Corn-Law Association was formed, which ultimately and soon became the now famous Anti-Corn-Law League. I will not speak of the labours of that League. They are known to some here. Those times by some are forgotten, and the League and its labours have gone into the past. Happily, its results remain, and can never be destroyed. But for seven years the discussion on that one question—whether it was good for a man to have half a loaf or a whole loaf—for seven years the discussion was maintained, I will not say with doubtful result, for the result never was doubtful and never could be in such a cause; but for five years or more we devoted ourselves without stint; every waking hour almost was given up to the discussion and to the movement in connection with this question. And there is one incident that to me is most touching in connection with it, which I hesitate to refer to, and yet feel I can scarcely avoid. It was in September in the year 1841. The sufferings throughout the country were fearful; and you who live now, but were not of age to observe what was passing in the country then, can have no idea of the state of your country in that year. If you want to know something of it, and in brief, I would ask you to possess

yourselves of a little volume just published by my old and dear friend Mr. Henry Ashworth, of Bolton, called 'Recollections of Cobden and the Anti-Corn-Law League.' You will find in a portion of that book a description of a state of things not only in all the towns, the manufacturing and industrial towns of the country, but in the agricultural districts for which it was pretended the protection of the Corn Law was maintained.

At that time I was at Leamington, and I was, on the day when Mr. Cobden called upon me—for he happened to be there at the time on a visit to some relatives—I was in the depths of grief, I might almost say of despair, for the light and sunshine of my house had been extinguished. All that was left on earth of my young wife, except the memory of a sainted life and of a too brief happiness, was lying still and cold in the chamber above us. Mr. Cobden called upon me as his friend, and addressed me, as you might suppose, with words of condolence. After a time he looked up and said, 'There are thousands of houses in England at this moment where wives, mothers, and children are dying of hunger. Now,' he said, 'when the first paroxysm of your grief is past, I would advise you to come with me and we will never rest till the Corn Law is repealed.' I accepted his invitation. I knew that the description he had given of the homes of thousands was not an exaggerated description. I felt in my conscience that there was a work which somebody must do, and therefore I accepted his invitation, and from that time we never ceased to labour hard on behalf of the resolution which we had made. Now, do not suppose that I wish you to imagine that he and I, when I say 'we,' were the only persons engaged in this great question. We were not even the first, though afterwards, perhaps, we became the foremost before the public. But there were others before us; and we were joined, not by scores, but by hundreds, and afterwards by thousands, and afterwards by countless multi-

tudes; and afterwards famine itself, against which we had warred, joined us; and a great Minister was converted, and minorities became majorities, and finally the barrier was entirely thrown down. And since then, though there has been suffering, and much suffering, in many homes in England, yet no wife and no mother and no little child has been starved to death as the result of a famine made by law.

Now, if you cast your eyes over the globe, what is it you see? Look at Canada; look at the United States, whether on the Atlantic seaboard or on the Pacific slope; look at Chili; look at the Australian colonies; look at the great and rich province of Bengal; look on the shores of the Black Sea and the Baltic; wherever the rain falls, wherever the sun shines, wherever there are markets and granaries and harvest-fields, there are men and women everywhere gathering that which comes to this country for the sustenance of our people; and our fleets traverse every sea, and visit every port, and bring us the food which only about thirty years ago the laws of this civilised and Christian country denied to its people. You find it in Holy Writ that 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' We have put Holy Writ into an Act of Parliament, and since then of that fulness every man and woman and little child in this country may freely and abundantly partake.

After that great work was done, after the session in which Sir Robert Peel paid that beautiful and most just tribute to the services of my lamented friend—for you know that he had suffered at the time from ill-health, which had caused his absence for many weeks from Parliament during that most interesting session—he proceeded to the continent of Europe, and visited most of its principal capitals. In every city he was received by the best men of that city. He was received there as a statesman who had achieved a great triumph in his own country, and who deserved to be received and accepted as a friend and brother by the friends of man in every

other country. He came back impressed with one great feeling of sorrow that the armaments of Europe were so great, and that the chances of war with great armaments were so much increased. He thought our armaments much too large and our taxes from that source much too heavy, and he wished to undertake a movement to convince the people that great reductions might be made. In that matter, I regret to say, he entirely failed. The fact is the people were not sufficiently instructed. They were terrified by the stories set before them, sometimes by ignorant, sometimes by interested persons, and his effort in that direction, as far as any immediate action or result was concerned, was an entire failure. After that, and not long after, came another great political transaction, which greatly disturbed him, as you may suppose. I mean the war with Russia—the Crimean War. Turning back to his pamphlet, one can understand the profound grief with which he must have seen the policy of the country at that time. He had warned it against such a policy; he had hoped that it was impossible; and yet in a moment of passion and prejudice that war was undertaken. Speaking to me about it more than once, he said, 'When the people are themselves in a state of frenzy, so that their reason seems to be dethroned, it is useless to argue with them. We must wait till there comes a cooler and more reasonable time.' He looked on, sad and dejected, till the termination of the strife.

After that, if you trace his great life and his works, you will come to that question which has been referred to by my friend Mr. Forster—the question of the French Treaty. Now, that was a great work which Mr. Cobden performed, as it were, of his own hand. He went to France, communicated with his friend Michel Chevalier, the eminent French economist, and put himself into communication with the Emperor, who was most honest and very intelligent upon this question. M. Rouher, the French Minister, was enabled to commence

negotiations, and through many months they went on, interfered with by many obstacles, but by no obstacles in France so great, I believe, as by some of the obstacles which came from this country. But finally the treaty was signed, and the triumph was achieved. I venture to say that there is no act of any statesman's life that may be looked back to with more unalloyed pleasure by him who did it, or by his friends who stood by him and commended it, than that great act of the commercial treaty with our neighbouring country, France.

There are persons who think that there did not much come out of it. These are people who want the world to get on much faster than it appears that Providence has enabled it to get on. I saw the other day in that little book of Mr. Ashworth's that he says no less than twenty-seven commercial treaties between different countries in Europe followed the treaty between England and France, and if it were the time or the opportunity now to give you the figures connected with it, you would see that the traffic between England and France in fifteen years had increased threefold, and that the commerce between half-a-dozen of the principal nations of Europe had increased also to an enormous extent.

Now we come to one other point which was a great grief to my lamented friend; that is, the question of the Civil War in America. You know how much he sympathised, I will not say with the institutions, but with the interests of the United States. He visited that country twice during the course of his life. He had made, as he made wherever he went, many very earnest and very warm friends. He, I think, was more broken down in heart and feeling by the American War, perhaps, than any other man that I happened to know at that time in England. He had thought that there was a country spreading over a whole continent, and that in that country would be perpetual peace. There was no great army, there was no great navy; there were no foreign politics; America was the home of peace.

But he had not calculated the effect of a vast calamity like the existence of slavery in that country. Slavery was one of those devils that would not go out without tearing the nation that was possessed of it. But still he always believed that the result of the war would be slavery abolished, and the great Republic, still one and indivisible, henceforth, as he had hoped it would be before the war, the advocate of peace and the promoter of civilisation. Now, my friend did not see the fulfilment of his wishes. It was a circumstance somewhat significant, and very affecting to my mind, that on the very day that President Lincoln and the Northern forces entered the city of Richmond, and when in point of fact the Slave Confederacy was vanquished and at an end—on that very day—that very Sunday, the 2nd of April, in the year 1865—the spirit of my friend left its earthly tenement, and took its way to another, and to him doubtless, a brighter world.

I had been only a month before that sad day visiting him at his home at Midhurst. It was a clear day in the early March. We strolled out into the fields, and as we were returning home he began to talk of his poor boy—his only son—who died some nine or ten years, I think, before, and turning round and pointing to the beautiful little church, in a most lovely situation, he said, 'Yes, my poor boy lies there and I shall soon be with him.' I little thought how soon. Only a few days afterwards he came up to London. It was a time when the question of expending large sums on the absurd and monstrous idea of defending Canada from the United States by costly fortifications was before the public, and he came up to London with the intention of speaking upon that question, and of pointing out to the House of Commons the foolish and irrational course on which they were invited to enter. He came up upon one of the bitterest days of that month of March, and he was stricken by cold—and fatally stricken. Only, I think, some ten days

afterwards his complaint became greatly aggravated; and on that 2nd of April of which I have spoken I was at his rooms early in the morning, and remained with him during some unconscious hours until the final close of a life to which I felt myself, and have always felt myself, so strongly attached.

One more picture of him. I attended his funeral at Midhurst. He was laid in the same vault with his poor boy, in which they are now accompanied by the remains of his dear wife and the dear boy's mother. I attended, I say, the funeral. Before we left the house, standing by me, and leaning on the coffin, was his sorrowing daughter, one whose attachment to her father seems to have been a passion scarcely equalled amongst daughters. She said, 'My father used to like me very much to read to him the Sermon on the Mount.' His own life was to a large extent—I speak it with reverence and with hesitation—a sermon based upon that best, that greatest of all sermons. His was a life of perpetual self-sacrifice.

I have lately been reading a new poem which has interested me very much—a poem called 'The Epic of Hades.' Many of you may never have heard of it. Most of you may not have seen it. It is, as I view it, another gem added to the wealth of the poetry of our language. In that poem the author says—

> 'For knowledge is a steep which few may climb,
> While duty is a path which all may tread.'

I think it will be admitted by those who know anything of the life of Mr. Cobden that he trod what he believed to be the path of duty, and trod it with a firm and unfaltering footstep; and when I look upon this statue which is now before us, so like him, and so spotless, as was his name and his character, I will say that I trust his following of the path of duty will have many imitators in this district, and that from this stainless marble, and from those voiceless

lips, there may be taught a perpetual lesson to many generations of the intelligent and industrious men of this district of our country.

But let me add, that this which you have erected to-day, or which is erected in your midst, is by no means the greatest monument that has been built up to him. There is one far grander and of wider significance. There is not a homestead in the country in which there is not added comfort from his labours, not a cottage the dwellers in which have not steadier employment, higher wages, and a more solid independence. This is his enduring monument. He worked for these ends, and for these great purposes, and he worked even almost to the very day when the lamp of life went out. He is gone; but his character, his deeds, his life, his example remain a possession to us his countrymen. And let this be said of him for generations to come, as long as the great men of England are spoken of in the English language; let it be said of him that Richard Cobden gave the labours of a life that he might confer upon his countrymen perfect freedom of industry, and with it not that blessing only, but its attendant blessings of plenty and of peace.

XXIII.

BRADFORD, JULY 25, 1877.

[After the ceremony of unveiling the statue was over, Mr. Bright was entertained at luncheon with many other guests at the Victoria Hotel, Bradford, by Mr. Jacob Behrens, President of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce. In answer to the toast of Mr. Bright's health, the following address on Free-trade was delivered.]

I HAD no opportunity this morning—it was not the place or the time—to enter into the consideration of any of the subjects which were mentioned in the address which was kindly presented to me by the Chamber of Commerce. As a matter almost of course—seeing what are the pursuits of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce—the question of Free-trade was prominent in that address. I believe there is no Chamber of Commerce in the kingdom which has done so much—I am quite sure there is no Chamber that has done more—than the Chamber of this town in the promotion of Free-trade during the time that I have been interested in it. And what they did in 1860, and what they have been doing in the recent negotiations with France, are known better here probably than elsewhere; but I believe the efforts have been most efficient and most meritorious.

In France, as in every other country where you have to meet an organised monopoly, you find the great difficulty of making any progress; but still I think Mr. Behrens will

bear me out when I say that the difficulties at present arising from the state of public opinion in France are very much less than they were seventeen years ago, when the treaty was negotiated. At that time it was said that if the Emperor had not the power of making the treaty according to his own constitution without reference to the Chambers, the treaty would not have had a chance of being passed, and I believe it was true. But now, in all probability—at least there are strong hopes, I do not know whether under the Government that now exists or its successor—but such is the change in public opinion in reference to a treaty with this country, that a fair treaty, a treaty at least equal to the last, possibly somewhat better, may have a good chance of passing the Chambers. If that be so, that is a proof that one result of the treaty of 1860 and the experiment which has been made has been to loosen them in some degree from the errors and the selfishness of Protection, and to give them more correct views with regard to international commerce.

Now, we have in America, too, a tariff that is monstrous, and if it did not exist other nations would say it is quite incredible that a nation so intelligent as the United States could have such a tariff. Then we have in some of our own colonies—in Canada and at least one of the colonies of Australia—tariffs which are great barriers against trade. It is a strange thing that what to us is so evil should exist in intelligent countries with so little protest, but in looking over the journals that Mr. Cobden kept when he was negotiating the treaty, there was an explanation of it which serves for all times and all countries. Discussing the matter with the Emperor, the Emperor said, 'The difficulty is this, the monopolists may be few. They may be a minority of the people. Their interests are not to be compared to the interests of the nation, but the monopolists are an organised body. They are a disciplined army, and the people, the

great consuming public, are only a mob.' Now, that was exactly the state of things here, and when the Anti-Corn-Law League became disciplined and drilled, and instructed the people, and brought their battalions and armies of producers into the field, then the monopoly was abolished. Well, it is very difficult to get any such agitation up in France. Their internal condition is one which I suppose would not admit of an agitation such as that which we promoted, and which was so successful. But in the United States, at any rate, they might have it, only the organisation of the monopolists is so complete; and they have unfortunately a very plausible excuse, that, having incurred vast expense in their Civil War, and having a great debt and a heavy interest to provide for, it is necessary to have heavy duties upon imports, because that is the easiest way in which their revenue can be collected.

But we need not go, I am told, quite so far as the United States or Canada to find some trace of a lingering love for Protection. I do not hear of it much now amongst the landed proprietors, and even farmers I think have reconciled themselves to their present condition; but it is an amazing thing, if it be true, that amongst some, even manufacturers, there lingers a little love of the old evil and a little wish to return to it. Manufacturers of some special kinds of goods, which they think are interfered with, are afraid. As they cannot sell so freely as they would like, they wish a law that none of their countrymen should buy as freely as they could wish. That, put in brief, is the idea which is running in the minds, I am told, of some gentlemen. And I venture to say, for this country now to return to Protection under any form, to reciprocity, which means to a war of tariffs, would be in reality to bar the progress of the world and, I should say, to destroy our hopes of future peace. If we look to France, we see that Protection is becoming weaker; if we look to the United States, or consult any

intelligent American who comes to this country, we shall find that there it has been shaken, and is tottering towards its fall.

I suspect that the extraordinary distress—far greater, tenfold, than anything we have endured in England for the last two or three years—which has been felt throughout all the manufacturing industries of the United States—almost entirely might be attributed, if you were to probe it to the bottom, to their mistaken system, to their protective system, to their having misdirected so much capital, and to their having, on the strength of their high tariff, promoted great extensions of business which could not be permanently sustained; and now, with the help of both Houses of Congress and of all the absurd promises of the protective system, they are in a condition of suffering, I believe, more oppressive than that which has been felt in any country in Europe, and infinitely surpassing anything we have known at the same period in this country. And at this moment you read in the papers of terrible scenes which have taken place in some parts of the State of Pennsylvania. These scenes, I believe, come very much from the same cause—the vast inflation of their iron industries promoted by the extravagant and, to foreign trade, ruinous tariff. Then there comes the collapse. Then there comes the necessity, from the impoverishment of the capitalist, for the great fall of wages, and then the attempt to resist the fall of wages by men who have had very high wages for a long time, and who are brought down to something more moderate, and to something that may possibly approach actual suffering, and there springs up a riot which approaches even to the dimensions of a local insurrection—one I should say of the most deplorable and discreditable things that have happened in the Northern States so far as my knowledge of their history goes. I believe that a great deal of that, if it were traced back to its source, would be found to have arisen from the results of the financial and

fiscal errors which the people and the Government of the United States have committed.

There is one point I wish to take a few minutes in noticing. Some time ago I met with a very intelligent gentleman from the city of Berlin, who was talking to me on the subject of Free-trade. He held the same opinions which the majority of us hold on that subject, and holding a very strong opinion on the enormous armaments of Europe, he said he thought we had been accustomed rather to discuss the Free-trade question as a question of economics and of buying and selling—of selling in the dearest and buying in the cheapest markets, and giving to everybody the utmost he could fairly get of all that the world and its industry produces. But, he said, there is another great question which has not been so much dwelt upon, and that is the vast armaments of Europe. He thought if we could have a great reduction, or the abolition, of the tariffs of the great powers of Europe, it would, as a matter of necessity, bring about a corresponding reduction of armaments and a cessation almost entirely of all the causes which promote or permit of war. Now, if we take the countries of France and England, in which we have had this treaty, is there any man in this room, or out of it in this country, who is at all intelligent—is there any man who doubts that from the time of the passing of that treaty the state of feeling between France and England has been entirely changed, and changed in a most wholesome direction? We all know that when the Emperor agreed to that treaty he agreed to it with an honest intention that the two countries should be united by commercial relations. I saw him myself in an interview which Mr. Cobden had with him, and in which I accompanied him, just at the conclusion of the treaty. He put his hands together in this way (clasping his hands), and he said, 'What I want is that the two countries should be so bound together by their commercial interests that it should not be in the power

of any Government, or Sovereign, or statesmen to bring them into a state of war.' Well, the moment that treaty passed, the feelings that had previously existed in England, and which, I am sorry to say, an eminent statesman fostered —immediately that treaty was passed we had a different state of feeling, and so it has been ever since.

Suppose there were no tariff in France, and no tariff in England, or an approach to that state, and imagine for a moment that there were no other countries in the world but France and England, it is clear that as far as they are concerned, their interests being so much in common in trade, neighbours necessarily dealing with each other, the maintenance of their armaments would be an act of obvious lunacy, and it would become absolutely impossible. The armaments would be disbanded, and what would happen with reference to France and England, supposing they were the only countries to be concerned, would be that it would save them at least 40,000,000*l.* a year, and it would save them the waste of time and labour of at least 750,000 men. Well, but passing from England and France, and looking over Europe, who are the people who dictate all these things? Public opinion first, of course, but sometimes acting very irregularly and with laggard steps. The French Government, the German Government, the Austrian Government, the Italian Government, and the Russian Government, here are five: we may almost put out of view the Turkish Government, but they at least, according to their past ideas, would not object to be without a tariff, as they do not seem ever to have known anything about trade. The Spanish Government makes six—seven with the Turkish. Well, there wants the determination, say on the part of seven Governments, with the support of their seven peoples, and if it were possible to conceive that there could arise a potentate, not powerful from the number of his legions, but powerful from his honourable conduct, and his great capacity and high morality—if there should arise such a man, who

should be able to introduce to the Powers of Europe a great theory like this, and to bring them to consent to put it into practice, it seems to me that you might have a transformation of this part of the world such as the wildest dreamer—I shall be called the wildest dreamer, perhaps—has hardly pictured to himself. And yet it does not seem an impossible thing at all. We have done, so far as our tariff is concerned, almost all that is necessary to be done for this great object which I am pointing out. France has gone some steps towards it; other countries have done something towards it; but some of them are still extravagant and wild in the contrary direction.

I have asked myself sometimes whether it would not be advisable for somebody in this country, whether the Associated Chambers of Commerce, who, I am afraid, occupy themselves very much in very small things, the mint, the anise, and the cummin, forgetting the weightier matters of the law—if it were advisable for the Associated Chambers of Commerce to consider generally throughout the country some great question like this, or if it were for the Cobden Club, or for some specially formed association, to endeavour to obtain in each of the capitals of Europe, in all the commercial cities of Europe, a small committee, if it were only half-a-dozen men, or three men (and I am not sure that one good man does not make a very good committee on many occasions), but a small committee of men thoroughly in earnest, who believe in the practical universality of Free-trade for the promotion of human interests, and who believe that if that doctrine were accepted and carried into operation to the extent that I have suggested, we should lessen the great armies of Europe, with their, what shall I say? far more than 100,000,000*l.* sterling every year wasted, and at least 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 of men, with all their labour, wasted also, and at the same time with perpetual risk of the breaking out of some gigantic struggle which may drench with blood some of the fairest provinces of the Continent.

I do not pretend, of course, that this is a small matter and that it can easily be done, but I do contend that it is one which it is worth while for all commercial men, all thoughtful men, all cultured men, all Christian men in this country just to give, if it were only a very little, their attention to. There are young men who are looking out for something useful to do. I am getting too old to take an active part in matters of this kind. If I had been twenty years younger I should have been glad to co-operate with such as would have been willing to work with a view to bring about if it were possible some small portion—making some few, it might be feeble, steps in the direction which I have pointed out. And there are possibly in this room amongst those whom I address some who may at some future time, and that not distant, take part in the work which would bless a suffering world, and which I am quite sure it is necessary that some sensible and benevolent and just-minded persons should undertake.

I am surrounded by dignitaries of the Chambers of Commerce, the President of your Chamber, and Mr. Whitwell, who is a leading man in the Associated Chambers. I do not know whether it is anything that they can do, but if they could step out a little from the small but not unimportant matters in which they have engaged themselves, I am not sure that they could not make themselves a great power in this country, and acting upon Chambers of Commerce and corresponding bodies in other parts of Europe, that they could not bring about an action that in course of time might make a great change in this part of the world. The fact is the world, as we are in it but for a very short time, does not seem to go on very fast, and we must be satisfied if we can only move it a little; but the interests of all mankind are so bound up in this question that it only wants that you should dispel the sort of fog which intercepts their vision, when they would come at once to see a promised land which was within their reach, and a fruit such as they have never tasted that

was within their grasp; and if this view could once be opened to the intelligent people in these countries of a constantly growing intelligence, I have a confident belief that the time will come, that it must come, that it is in the decrees of the Supreme that it shall come, when these vast evils shall be suppressed, and men shall not learn war any more, and God's earth shall not be made, as it is, a charnel-house by the constant murder of hundreds of thousands of His creatures.

XXIV.

BRADFORD, JULY 25, 1877.

[In the evening of the day a crowded meeting was held at the Bradford Liberal Hall. An address was presented to Mr. Bright, in which allusion was made to some of the measures with which his name has been associated, and in particular stated that 'although a great change had taken place in public opinion since the Crimean War, British interests and a spirited foreign policy are made in some quarters still the shadowy and dangerous pretext for departing from a strict and wise neutrality.' The Eastern crisis is the principal topic treated of in the following address.]

I ACCEPT the address which has just been read by Mr. Salt, and which has been presented to me on behalf of the Executive Committee, and on behalf of this great assembly. I accept it with a feeling that I have come far short of the flattering and complimentary expressions which have been offered to me, but I accept it also with a consciousness that I have endeavoured to do something to promote the true and lasting interests of my country.

The address has referred to several topics of great importance, but there is one of them which is touched upon towards its close which appears to me at this moment to require and to deserve precedence over the others. It is the topic of the foreign policy of this country at the present very critical time in our history. We are the citizens of a very great empire, such as has never before existed upon the globe. It is an empire in which we cannot avoid having some pride,

and if we are sensible and wise, we cannot avoid saying that there is not a small peril connected with it. We have wide interests touching other countries in almost every part of the globe. Being ourselves in Europe we occupy two comparatively small islands, with a dense population, with great industry, with vast wealth, and with a great authority amongst the nations. We have, I suppose, in different continents, ten times the territory that we occupy in these islands. In North America there is a territory subject to the Crown of England ten times the measured space of the United Kingdom. In Africa there is a territory so large, that with the recent annexation—of which one hopes, for the sake of our character, that Russia will never hear—we have a territory the boundary of which is not known, I believe, to any man in the United Kingdom. In India we have a territory not less extensive, and a population six or eight times that of the United Kingdom. In Australia we have again a territory probably ten times the measured space of the United Kingdom; and if we speak of islands which are subject to the sceptre of the Queen, reckoning those that have been lately added of the Fiji group, I am not sure that Lord Carnarvon, or any of his subordinates at the Colonial Office, could make an accurate return to Parliament of the number of islands that are dependencies of the Crown. With this vast empire, then, how great must be our interest in the cause of peace. If we are at war, nearly half the world is at war, for England cannot go to war but every territory over which England rules is necessarily also at war with, for the time, the enemy of England.

And yet, considering our vast interests and our vast perils, there is always in this country—at least, so far as my recollection goes back—there is always a war party. It is found in the press constantly. Unfortunately for the public interests, there is hardly anything that tends so much to enhance the profits of the proprietors of newspapers as a

stirring and exciting conflict. We have a war party in Parliament, and there are always men who sit there, and though the great majority of them are on the side opposed to that on which I sit, yet I sometimes think there are a few even on our side whose language and whose conduct are not strongly in favour of peace. And amongst the public we know—everybody knows—that there can arise almost no question of foreign policy in which we do not find people unprincipled enough, unscrupulous enough, or ignorant enough to wish that the military power and prowess of England should be again displayed both on sea and on land. Fortunately for us, this war party is not always powerful enough to prevail, but it is always powerful enough, or at least very frequently so, to disturb and to injure the true interests of our country.

Now, I propose to ask you just for a little time to examine the two policies which are before us. The one is the policy of war, wherever there is a temptation to it, or an excuse for it. The other is the policy of peace, so long as peace is possible. Those are the two policies which are now before us, and I shall ask you what is your opinion, and for which of these policies you will give your vote and your voice. Let us look back since the period of the last great war, the war with Russia, which was carried on chiefly in the Crimea. How many wars have there been in Europe, or wars amongst civilised and so-called Christian nations during that period? I will go back to the year 1859, when there was a war between France and Sardinia against the Empire of Austria. Fortunately we took no part in that war. I recollect during that time making a call, as I did not unfrequently, upon the late Lord Aberdeen, who was Prime Minister four or five years before the time of which I am speaking. Lord Aberdeen was then an aged and a most experienced statesman. He spoke to me of the war that was then in progress in the North of Italy, and he said that when he was young there would not

have been two opinions in England amongst statesmen or public men of any authority as to the course which England should take. He said all would have agreed that it was necessary to take sides with Austria, and to declare war against France, for fear that France by her success, along with Sardinia, should obtain an influence in Italy, which would disturb the balance of power, and be injurious to British interests. But he added—and I recollect well the solemnity and seriousness of his voice—'All that is changed, and I hope and believe it has changed greatly for the better.'

Well, the year after that, and as a consequence of that war, the districts or provinces of Savoy and Nice were disconnected from the Sardinian kingdom, and were handed over to France as compensation to the Emperor for the sacrifices France had made in the war against Austria. This did not bring us into war, but it brought us very near it, for our Foreign Office at that time was communicating with all the Courts of Europe in order to ascertain if there were not an opinion like our own in Europe that would enable us to remonstrate against and probably to prevent annexation of those two provinces to France. Fortunately the other Powers did not take the same view of the case. They would not join us in any action upon it; the matter was settled, and we escaped the calamity of war. In 1864, that is, four years later, there was war between Germany and Denmark, and there we ran an imminent risk of war, for people said there was an old treaty by which we were bound to defend Denmark, and I am not sure that there was not; but happily, somebody discovered that the treaty was an old and musty document —that in point of fact it was like some old and musty and almost forgotten Acts of Parliament—and the treaty was declared, like these Acts of Parliament, to be obsolete, and therefore it was resolved that we were not called upon to defend Denmark and enter into war with the whole of Germany. Soon after this, only two years later, Austria and

Prussia, having so lately united against Denmark, quarrelled between themselves. That was a war amongst the Germans, rather having the character of a civil war, and we took no part in that.

In 1870 there was war between Prussia and France. You know the result—that France was vanquished, and that Prussia became Germany. There were persons then who advised that we should take sides. Some said that Belgium was in great danger—some said one thing, and some another. Eminent men said, 'If you are in favour of peace, as England ought to be, you should declare war against that power by whom war is declared.' That is, if France declares war against Prussia, you should join Prussia in the interests of peace, and declare war against France; if Prussia should declare war against France, then you should join France in the interests of peace, and make war against Prussia. And some said that Louis Napoleon, the Emperor of the French, was little better than an usurper, and it would be well for England to drive the family of the Bonapartes for ever from the throne of France. Well, these people were very discordant, they only agreed in one thing, and that was, the absolute unwisdom in discussing the point in question.

But during this time, too, there was another great war—from 1860 to 1865—the civil war in the United States. You remember what took place then. There was a war party here; some wanted to coalesce with the Emperor of the French, to acknowledge the Confederacy of the Southern States, to make slavery perpetual over those great regions, and to enter into a fatal contest with the great power of the North. If we had done it, it would not have succeeded in establishing the Slave Confederacy, for great as were the armies in the North when left to themselves to fight the South, if any Power in Europe had interfered, not the million of men they had in the field, but another million of men would soon have been in the field, and the result, whatever

might have happened—whether the Confederacy was established or whether the Republic was re-united — this would have been certain, that the twenty or thirty millions in the Northern States—and they would soon have been much more than even thirty millions—would have been for generations filled with a bitter hostility to this country, and the brotherhood between that people and ourselves, for which we hope and for which we pray, would have been postponed even for many generations.

Well now, in these cases you see that war was avoided, that we escaped its penalties, and I would ask you now—Is there one single man in the United Kingdom outside Bedlam, and I doubt if there be one inside it, who regrets the course of neutrality which the people and the Government of the United Kingdom pursued? But there was one case in which we took a different course, and that is the case of the war between Russia and Turkey. In 1853 Turkey declared war against Russia, and we, after advising the Turk to accept a certain proposition of mediation and arbitration, which the Turk refused, and which Russia accepted, took sides with Turkey notwithstanding, and entered into a sanguinary conflict with Russia. Now, if in 1853 we had advised the Porte to concede the demands, to make a concession urged upon them by Russia, which was only to strengthen the influence of Russia in defence of the Christian population of Turkey, Turkey would have avoided that war, which was the forerunner, it may be, of her destruction, and we should have avoided the contest into which we entered; three-quarters of a million of men, according to Mr. Kingslake—more I think he puts it at—would have been saved from slaughter or from death by toil and neglect and disease; millions, I know not how many, perhaps something like two hundred or three hundred millions of treasure, would not have been wasted, and in all probability we should have avoided a vast increase of the armies of the Continent which

took place after that war and as an immediate consequence of it, and the many subsequent wars that have disturbed the peace of Europe. It was a grand line that Milton wrote in one of his grand sonnets, when he says,—

'For what can war but endless war still breed?'

and that war has bred indescribable loss and suffering to several of the nations of Europe.

But at that time there was a great jealousy of Russia. The judgment of the nation was disturbed, argument was of no avail, facts that were true were disputed, passions were excited, and the Government themselves, responsible to a large extent for exciting the people, went into that disastrous and, in my opinion, most unnecessary contest. But the war party is always jealous of somebody; it always hates somebody. Forty years ago it was jealous of Russia, and at that time to such an extent was the public afraid of Russia that they believed that we in the North of England, and especially those in the Eastern coast of Yorkshire, were in danger of an invasion from the Baltic. Now we know that that was a belief that should have established the lunacy of a man who said he was sane and was not. And yet under that sort of panic the Government of the time added 5,000 men to the English navy, and then the public began to think that after all perhaps they might be safe. Then this same war party was jealous of France, and hated the French Empire and everybody connected with the then Government of France. That hatred lasted until the treaty of 1860; since that treaty that simple document, a document that the President of your Chamber of Commerce and the President of a Chamber of Commerce in France could have drawn up in a short time,—there was nothing abstruse, nothing difficult, nothing mysterious about it—that document alone has had the effect of removing the suspicion we had of France; and at the present moment the Channel does not separate us, but unites

us, and the trade from that empire and from England to that country has increased so much that now you never find any man who has any jealousy of France. Even the war party of the press would seem, so far as France is concerned, to be for the time put entirely out of court and suppressed.

There was another great suspicion that men had at one time, and that was about the United States and Canada. We know, everybody knows, that if the United States were unjust enough, aggressive enough, and malignant enough to invade Canada, that with their vast power, their 40,000,000 of population against the 4,000,000 of Canada, they could easily pass the boundaries and occupy the whole Canadian territory. No fortifications that we could raise or that Canada could raise would prevent that result. But the United States are not a country whose people are brigands and buccaneers. They are a country which, except during the time of their civil war, from the time of their establishment as a free nation, have only been at war I think about four years; and as regards half of that time in one of those wars they had at least as much justification as we have ever had for any of the wars in which we have been engaged.

We come now to our own time, and the old influence comes up again. The old sore is before us; the old jealousy exists; the old peril comes round again, and we have to confront it as best we may. The Turk, even by the acknowledgment of his friends, has behaved very badly. He was brought for trial, in some sort, before the Conference held at the close of the year,—the Conference at Constantinople. The verdict went against him, but there was no result, for there was no European concert. I am sorry to say that the course pursued by England, as represented by her Government, made European concert absolutely impossible. And now it might have been thought reasonable, that if we were not willing to enforce the verdict we might at any rate have stood aside and left Turkey to its fate. Russia has undertaken

to enforce that verdict. I have nothing to say in defence of Russia except this, that if the Conference was wise, if the negotiation was a just interference, if the verdict of the Conference was a righteous verdict, it seems only in accordance with reason and with logic that somebody should enforce it. And the Russians being upon the borders of Turkey, and suffering, of course, more than we do from any disturbance in the Turkish provinces, the people of Russia having a great sympathy with the Christian population of Turkey, and that sympathy having a great influence upon the Russian Government, Russia therefore steps forward in accordance with the common practice of nations, as we find in all histories of the past. She steps forward to defend that Christian population, and to put down evils and disturbances and oppressions which had become intolerable in the sight of all Europe.

We might have supposed that our Government would have been entirely neutral, but its neutrality is not exactly of that perfect kind which I think it ought to have been. For example, we say to Russia you must not touch Egypt—but Egypt is at war with Russia—because Egypt is constantly sending ships of war and troopships with soldiers to the help of the Sultan. Russia, sensibly enough, not being anxious to come into conflict with England, pledges herself that Egypt shall be kept outside of the military operations in which she is engaged. But, we say further, at least many people say, I am not quite sure whether the Government have said it in express language, but people believe they mean it, that Russia shall not approach Constantinople. But if Russia is not to approach Constantinople what is that but to prolong the war and to give Turkey an inducement not to make peace, and to shut out Russia from one of the commonest rights of a belligerent? For surely to take the capital city of an empire or a kingdom at war, and to occupy it, is the speediest mode of bringing that war to a conclusion. Our Government now appears to hold, as far as it can, the

doctrines and the policy of 1854. It adheres to what has been called 'that ghastly phantom—the balance of power.'

That balance of power is a curious, shadowy thing, which has brought us much evil. In 1830, France, under Charles X, captured Algiers and made herself possessor of a large tract of country on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. At that time it was said that France was making the Mediterranean a French lake, and disturbing the balance of power. Happily we did not go to war for it, and, as it turned out, ten days after the capture of Algiers the King of France was a refugee on the shores of this island, and from that time to this Algiers has been a costly burden to the French people. I do not doubt that in the forty-seven years which have elapsed since that transaction France has spent 100,000,000*l.* as the result of the possession of Algeria; and it would be a small estimate to say that it had cost more than 100,000 French lives. And France is not a bit stronger to-day; the balance of power is not in the smallest degree disturbed by the conquest of Algeria by France. But what else has happened?

There is a new kingdom in Europe—the Kingdom of Italy. Italy was composed of a number of small States, and by a variety of transactions and circumstances, which I need not describe, these small States have united under one Sovereign and now form the Kingdom of Italy. And what is the Kingdom of Italy doing? Building a fleet. It is as foolish as other kingdoms. It is building a fleet that is not in any degree necessary, which is burdening its subjects with heavy taxes; and they boast of having an ironclad more powerful than exists in any other country, and that whereas we possess a gun that is called an 81-ton gun, the Italians are putting a gun of 100 tons on board one of their ships. Well, but is this no disturbance of the balance of power? Of course it is. The little kingdoms of Italy had no power whatsoever in Europe, and nobody asked their opinion upon any European

question. The Kingdom of Italy, as it takes in these small States, becomes a powerful kingdom, and it is admitted into the family of the Great Powers, and its advice is constantly asked, and now you see from late paragraphs in the papers, which may be untrue, and which I hope are so, that Italy, having some aggressive propensities, coveting territory which does not now belong to it, is anxious to take part with Russia in order that, whatever scramble may take place at the end or during the progress of this war, Italy may add something to her dominions. But we have not thought it necessary to interfere with the formation of the Italian Kingdom. No, we patronised it; we were in some degree responsible for it, and we have never believed that the formation of the new Kingdom of Italy, and the adding of a new member to the powerful family of European nations, was injurious to Europe, or in the slightest degree pernicious to the interests of this country.

Then, again, you have had another disturbance of the balance of power through the war of 1870, between Prussia and France. What did that do? It left France vanquished and its capital in the possession of the German army, and the great centre of power in Europe, which was supposed to rest in Paris, has been transferred in the most open and admitted manner to Berlin, the capital of Germany, There was a disturbance of the balance of power in that case, and yet we have never thought it necessary to alarm ourselves about it, much less to go to war to prevent it. Now, I take it for granted with regard to Constantinople—which is a terrible bugbear to the war party—I take it for granted that if the Russians should succeed in this war—and of that I give no kind of opinion—that the determination of what shall be the destiny and the government of Constantinople will be referred to something like a General Council of the Powers of Europe. Russia has over and over again proclaimed in every form of words, and by every kind of solemnity of expression, that it

is not her intention even to attempt to hold Constantinople. The Russians have declared that they would not consent that it should become the possession of any of the other Great Powers of Europe; but they have not shut themselves out from the fair consideration with the other Powers of what, consistent with the interests of Europe, shall be the future condition and government of that great city.

Then there comes the question of the opening of the straits. You hear continually the word 'Bosphorus.' The straits, as you know, are narrow passages leading from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. I presume you are all now acquainted with the geography of this part of the world, and it is nearly all the good we get amongst the vast evil of war that we learn something of geography. Well, these straits run entirely through Turkish territory. They are very narrow; they are easily defended from either shore; but chiefly at the prompting, and in the supposed interest, of England, the Russians, who possess large territories round, or half-round, the Black Sea, are not permitted to send any ship of war from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean, or to bring or navigate any ship of war from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. The straits are open to the trade of all nations, and were opened by the Russians themselves a hundred years ago, after they had been closed to the commerce of the world during three hundred years of their possession by the Turk. Now, I hold the opening of the straits to be absolutely inevitable, but under conditions which the Powers of Europe will find no difficulty, I believe, in arranging. It would be easy to adopt what is called on the railways the block system. There are two arguments against the opening of the straits. The one is that the Turk, possessing Constantinople, might reasonably complain that if they were opened a great fleet from Russia—they always suppose it is from Russia—a great fleet from the Black Sea, of ironclads, might anchor opposite Constantinople, and even

menace and bombard that city. Well, of course, such a fleet could do it, as anybody of course can do almost any mischief he takes it into his head to do. The other argument is this—that the Russian fleet, coming from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean, would not be very far off the Suez Canal, and might interfere with the trading traffic and the military traffic between this country and our dependencies in India. That, of course, Russia might do, just as Austria or Italy might do, or France might do it. They all have fleets in the Mediterranean, and if they chose singly to go to war with England, or, by a combined operation, to resist us and to obstruct the passage of the Canal, that would be a declaration of war against England, and, of course, England would feel bound to interpose to prevent any such obstruction; but there is no more reason to believe Russia would interfere with the Canal than that France would interfere with it. The United States have not overrun Canada; the Mediterranean is not a French lake; the Russians have not invaded the east coast of England from the Baltic; there was no country in Europe that, until these vile suspicions were aroused, was more disposed to a perpetual amity with England than the great Empire of Russia.

But one more observation upon this. I said that those straits passed through Turkish territory and that you might make provision that not more than one ship or two ships, or whatever limited number was thought proper, should ever be at one time in the straits between the two seas; and therefore the possessor of Constantinople, whether Turk or Greek, or any other Power or people, would be free from menace and bombardment from any fleet passing up or down the Channel. But what do we do? There is another narrow channel that runs entirely through Turkish territory; we are shareholders in a joint-stock company which made it. You know, of course, that the Suez Canal runs entirely through Turkish territory. And what do we say there? We say

there, that so important is it for us, for our trade, for the supply of troops if need be for India, for the passage of our ships of war, if it is necessary for them to be sent to India —so important is this to our interests, that we are ready to defy the world in arms to keep that Canal open for our traffic. But surely the Canal from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, the straits which the Creator of the world made for the traffic and service of the world, has as good a right to be open to the world as the straits, the Canal which was made by M. Lesseps with the money of his French shareholders.

It seems only the other day to me that I heard Lord Palmerston, when he was Prime Minister, in the House of Commons declaring that this Suez Canal was a chimera—it was a scheme that could not be completed, or could not succeed if it were completed; that it would be no advantage to England; that England should have nothing to do with it—none of its money should be spent upon it. Well, the result was that it was all thrown upon France, and France, stimulated by the hostility of the English Minister, poured forth its money in vast sums, and under the wonderful energy of M. Lesseps, the Canal was made—not only made, but it succeeds and will pay. Not only so, but we have become shareholders in it—not you and I, but our Government, and it is considered to be of all parts of the world that which at this moment we are the most bound to defend to the very last extremity. Now the fact is with regard to that Canal that I believe it is in more risk from the Turk than from anybody else; and I believe that all Europe would gladly enter into any kind of reasonable compact to guarantee its improvement, its being widened, and its being kept perpetually open for all the mercantile and other navies of the globe. I believe also that other nations, ourselves excepted, would be quite willing to see the straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean just as freely opened. They have

no kind of interest such as we pretend to have. Our interest, to my mind, is purely visionary. Russia is not a nation, is not likely to be for a long time a nation, that will have great fleets to traverse the Mediterranean as we have; and if she had a fleet there it would be no more hostile to us than the now creating, growing fleet of Italy, or the now existing formidable fleet of France.

And when I come to consider the position of Russia, shut up as she is in the North, in the Baltic, by the frost, her only entrance by the Sound, which is narrow; that she has no great navigable rivers running to the ocean—they run to the Black Sea and the Caspian—I say that it is one of the most unjust ideas, and one of the very wildest of unstatesmanlike notions, that this country can perpetually forbid a nation of 80,000,000 of people to find that access to the main ocean which the Creator of the world made equally for all His people upon the globe.

Now, may I be allowed to remark upon some recent news which I think, whatever judgment we may form upon it, must be admitted to be of a somewhat disturbing character. I am not anxious in my observations to-night to attack the Government. So far as I could find them taking a course which appeared to me wise for the country, I should be glad to offer them any support that I could give them; but I must say that their course has been one that has seemed to me not so much of a clear and decided statesmanship as a course of constantly varying caprice. I think they have damaged our own commerce and our own name. About a year and a-half ago they astounded the country by the announcement that they had become possessors of a large number of shares in the Suez Canal. And they gave twice as much for them as the Khedive, it is said, had offered them at in other quarters. But I will not object to a couple of millions here or there. I am not speaking now of the waste or misapplication of our taxes, I am speaking

of the policy. You know how that announcement was received. The London newspapers, which really knew, I suppose, nothing about it, announced it as the first step to a great, spirited, and, as they hoped, triumphant foreign policy. It was the first step towards the possession of all the Canal, and probably to the possession of Egypt itself. The Government did not deny that, in fact some things they said led to that conclusion; and yet afterwards we were informed by an eminent Minister of the Crown that it was little more than a commercial transaction which it was thought would be advantageous to the country; that we had so great an interest in the Canal that it would be well that we should have a voice upon the directing board. That is a matter of no great importance, and it is not one upon which we need either greatly to applaud, or perhaps to condemn, the Administration.

Well, by-and-by, what do they do further? They send out Mr. Cave, a member of the Government, to Egypt to look up the books and the affairs and the banking account of the Khedive. The Khedive did not ask for Mr. Cave, a member of the Government; he asked for a competent clerk or two from the Treasury. They sent a member of the Government out, and the result of that was to confirm the impression that we had some special and overwhelming interest in Egypt that would lead to some great transaction at no distant period. And then we had speeches, as you know; speeches made by the most eminent Ministers; speeches which excited undue suspicion and hostility in Russia, and speeches which excited in this country the ardour of the war party and excited the alarm of the great body of the people. Then we had the Conference at Constantinople, and people say—it is denied, it was denied by the Government, but people do say—that there were two voices that spoke to the Sultan. Now, I have heard two voices myself often that did not speak with any discordance.

I recollect one of my boys being very much surprised when I told him that, being in the Highlands, I heard a man shout and the echo answered in Gaelic. Well, but it answered in Gaelic because the man spoke in Gaelic; an echo repeats what it has heard, and though there are two sounds and two voices, there is only one thing said. The two voices which spoke in Constantinople apparently did not say the same thing. Whilst Lord Salisbury was endeavouring by all the means in his power to urge the Turk to those most moderate concessions which at last the Conference only demanded, and with which Russia would be content, and war would have been avoided, the war party in this country the war press, the war public men — that portion of the public which I call the rowdy war party — and there are rowdies amongst the rich as well as amongst the poor — I say all that party was speaking with another voice, and stimulating and encouraging the Turk to resist, and it has brought the Turk to the catastrophe in which he now finds himself.

Afterwards, or about that time, we had the fleet sent to Besika Bay. Well, there might be fair reasons for sending the fleet to Besika Bay. I do not want to take advantage of an act of this kind to bring charges against the Government, but all I say is that whilst the press of this party and the war party generally, and, I am afraid to say also, some members connected with the Government—although they had led us to conclude that the sending of the fleet to Besika Bay was in some sort a menace to Russia and an exhibition of the naval power of England, yet after all this excitement had been created, Ministers come forward and say that it really had nothing to do with these reasons, and that the fleet went there merely because they thought there would be some disturbance or insurrection in Constantinople, and that it was necessary for the fleet to be in the neighbourhood, for the purpose of taking care of

European people who might be there in that time of danger. So you see that there is scarcely anything that is done by the Government that is not misrepresented according to their own statement afterwards.

Now I really think that I am justified in bringing this charge against the Government—either they themselves do not fairly understand the effects of the particular acts which they recommend, and which they enforce, or that they behave in a manner showing almost no confidence in the public opinion of their country. I think that if they were to explain distinctly—they have opportunities every night in Parliament; they have opportunities every morning in influential organs of the press—if they would explain distinctly when they take any of these steps what is the meaning and what is the extent of them, that then the public would not be disturbed. What has been the case with these different acts? Look at the records of the Stock Exchange; how much some things go up and other things go down; and simple people who are not behind the scenes are led on very often in their purchases or sales or speculations, it may be to their ruin. And see what takes place in your markets—in your wool market, in your cotton market at Liverpool. All these are affected by those various acts, and I maintain that the commercial people of England—I am not now appealing to Liberal merchants and manufacturers, I appeal to all merchants and manufacturers, to all men who live by their daily labour—and I say they have a right to call upon the Government for a distinct enunciation of their policy.

Now, I admit with great frankness the difficulties of the Government. The difficulties would have been very great if our party had been in office. It would be unfair, it would be unjust altogether—an injustice of which I am altogether incapable—to bring against the Government indiscriminate charges because they have not done everything wisely in the great difficulties which they have had to consider and en-

counter. But they might certainly—at least I believe they might—have tamed down what I call the rowdy organs of their press. Look at the wild things that they have said. They talk of Constantinople; they talk of the Bosphorus; they now talk of Gallipoli—a little place just on the left-hand side as you go up the Dardanelles. I was once very near run ashore there myself. I only hope the Government will not be run ashore there. Then they talk of Crete; and there has been almost a shower of pamphlets and of articles in newspapers in favour of the seizure, or purchase, or annexation—various terms by which it is understood that we are to obtain possession—of Egypt as the highway to India, and govern it upon the plan on which we govern India. I do not say that that might not be even an advantage to those poor wretches, the subjects of our friend the Khedive; but there is one consideration that these wild and crazy people never for a moment look at. What do they think would be thought in Europe if anything of the kind was done? Why this, first of all; that having seized upon something that we thought was useful for us, we leave the whole of the rest of the Turkish Empire to be taken by anybody who is strong enough to seize it. And what would be thought by France? France has, as you know, a traditional regard for Egypt. I do not know whether it goes further back than the time of the first Napoleon, when forty centuries looked down from the Pyramids upon his armies, but France has from that time always been endeavouring to obtain what is called a strong interest with the Egyptian Government.

I was talking the other day to a gentleman—a Frenchman, and a very eminent Frenchman, who, when there is another Liberal Government in France, which I hope may be soon, will in all probability be an important member of that Government. I put this question to him. We had been talking about Egypt, and upon the language which was

held by some people in this country with regard to it. I said, 'What would be thought in France if England were, under any pretence and by any means, whether by force or by purchase, or in any way to obtain possession of Egypt?' He said it would create the very worst impression in that country, and his opinion was that no Government could maintain itself in France which permitted such a measure without the strongest protest and remonstrance, and whether protest and remonstrance would be all it was not very easy to determine. And all this for what? That our ships may go through the Canal to India. And there is no Power in the world that has at this moment, as I believe, the smallest disposition to interfere with it, but all of them have a great interest—not so great as ours, but still a great interest—in the perpetuation of the freedom of the Canal.

Now in this discord with regard to what should be done there is one other consideration of great importance, and that is, that England has no allies. I believe there is no country in Europe at this moment that feels with us in regard to these questions. We are alone in Europe, as I believe, with regard to the Bosphorus, and with regard to the question of danger as connected with the closing of the Canal. Amongst other nations our demands are felt to be unreasonable and arrogant, and I confess I sometimes fear that if we pursue this policy much further we shall stand the risk of some European combination against us, and that we shall find ourselves not triumphant but baffled. And when the final settlement comes of this question, unless we can be moderate and just, I suspect that there is great danger that we may suffer a humiliation which not the nation only as a whole, but which all of us individually, may be made severely to feel.

Now what is our true policy? I have pointed out to you that a great many wars have taken place since the Crimean War—unhappily have taken place—in which we have had

no part, though we ran in some of them great risks. None of us now regret our neutrality and our pacific policy. We violated that policy at the time of the Russian War, from 1854 to 1856, and now almost all of us repent that we did violate that policy. I believe that the policy of neutrality is the true and wise policy for this country. Not only is it true in morals, but it is true in statesmanship; and, in fact, I would not dissociate at all what is true in morals from what is true in statesmanship. I think that we might, and that we ought, whenever honest counsel is solicited—we ought to give honest counsel, and that if the time should come—and it may be remote—but if the time should come when the Powers of Europe should ask us or ask themselves what should be the future destiny of Constantinople; should the Turk remain there with circumscribed territory and power, or should the Greek return to the possession of his ancient seat of glory and of power, it would become this Government, not with selfishness, not with this miserable jealousy, but with honest and courageous advice, to join with the other Powers in that settlement that would be best for that region and best for the future interests and peace of Europe.

I began by saying that we were a great empire. It becomes a great State like this to set always to the world a great and noble example. I quote a passage from a recent speech of Lord Derby with a sentiment of the utmost admiration and with the fullest concurrence. He said, 'We must always remember that the greatest of British interests is the interest of peace.' Now at home what are we doing? We are advancing to the uttermost of our power—and it is a difficult and a rugged process, after generations of neglect—we are advancing as much as we can the education of our people. We are promoting to the utmost freedom of their industry, we are doing all we can to add to the comfort of their homes, and the content and satisfaction of their hearts.

Five years hence, if this matter be settled, and we do not interfere, we shall all be delighted that we did not interfere. Five years hence, if we do interfere, we shall lament for the dead whose blood has been sacrificed, for the treasure that has been wasted, for the added discord which we have brought to Europe, and, it may be, for the humiliation of our statesmanship and our military operations that we may have to undertake. Let us, then, I say, turning to our foreign policy, be as wise as we are endeavouring to be with our home policy. Let us try to be courteous to all nations, just to all nations; as far as we can, getting rid of the jealousies that have disturbed us, let us believe that whether it be the United States on the other side of the Atlantic, or whether it be the great Empire of Russia in the East of Europe, that there are good and great and noble men in those countries; that there is no disposition whatever—as I believe there is none—to make quarrels with this country, and to do no evil of any kind to us. Then, great as our nation is, with its power apparent in every quarter of the globe, great will be its influence for good, and though the world moves on slowly—far too slowly for our ardent hopes—to its brighter day, history will declare with impartial voice that Britain, casting off her ancient errors, led the grand procession of the nations in the path of civilisation and of peace.

XXV.

MANCHESTER, SEPTEMBER 13, 1877.

[The new Town Hall at Manchester, built from the designs of Mr. Waterhouse, was formally opened on this day. It had been hoped that the Queen would have been present at the ceremony, but somewhat unexpectedly the hope was disappointed. A very distinguished company was present, and Mr. Bright, being one of the guests, was requested to respond to the toast of the House of Commons.]

I BELIEVE this is the very first time in all my long experience that I have been asked to speak on behalf of the House of Commons, and I presume that I am asked to-night because I have been so long a time a member of that House. A friend of mine told me only a few weeks ago that in looking over the list of members of the House he found that there were not so many as twenty of them that had been members of it for so long a period. If I were to compare the House of Commons with this assembly, I should say that the House in one respect had rather the advantage, for in the House of Commons a man need not speak unless he looks for and attracts, or, as we say, 'catches' the Speaker's eye. He may sit—and many members do sit—most comfortably for the whole Session, and on no one occasion trouble the House with a speech. But here the case is different. When I had your invitation, Mr. Mayor, I felt grateful that you remembered an old acquaintance and

friend. At the same time I felt that I should have come to this banquet with much more courage, much less trepidation, if I had believed that I should be able to sit through our proceedings, enjoying that pleasant obscurity which is denied to those who are called upon to address you. My long experience has taught me, however, that the kind of pleasure is not permitted to me at public banquets, so I rise in obedience to an authority against which none of us dare to rebel.

I suppose that the object of a toast is that it should bring the persons toasted before the notice of those present, and excite favourable wishes on their behalf. We wish, I presume, health to the House of Commons, and I may be allowed to express an opinion—and there are others here who can correct me if I am wrong—I should say that for some time the health of the House of Commons has been but indifferent. I mean if health is to be tested by vigour, and freshness of life, and action. Some nine years ago I recollect, and since then, that the House of Commons exhibited much life and much freshness, and that everybody felt it to be a great assembly with great aims and the power of doing great work. But latterly from some cause—and I do not blame the House of Commons, for it is what it is by the fiat of those who sent it there, but I only state the fact—the House now appears to have lost all that vigour, and to be afflicted with a languor that is almost distressing. If I were a medical man called in to give an opinion, I should say from facts that are notorious that its appetite seems to be feeble, and as I have heard a doctor say in examining a patient, the tongue, if not actually foul, is in some degree furred. Well, what does your family doctor recommend when he finds some member of the household a little under par or deficient in energy—a little borne down, it may be, by the weary work of city life. Generally, he thinks country air would be of advantage, and I am not certain if the only remedy to which we can look, the only

change which will be of any benefit to that august assembly about which I am speaking, will not be that under some high medical authority it should be sent back to the country. So much for the House of Commons. It takes up so much of our time during six months of the year that the House may be content if we talk about something else during the recess, and I turn to the occasion on which we are now met.

I agree with what has been said that this is really a memorable day in this great city. I have on my left the Lord Provost of Edinburgh. He says that he has attended, as I believe that all Lord Provosts have a right to have attended, a great many banquets, but he does not think that he has ever before seen anything so complete and so grand in that line as the banquet at which he has been present to-night. On my right hand is the Lord Chief Justice of England. I cannot well appeal to any higher authority either as to law or fact, and he says that he thinks what he has seen here to-night is absolutely complete. This banquet then to-night stands distinguished among all the banquets that any of us have ever seen or attended. To-morrow night, I understand, these apartments will be filled by, I must say, a much more brilliant assemblage, without saying anything offensive of ourselves; and on the following day we are to have, if our September skies will permit, a multitudinous procession through the principal streets of the city. This shows, I think, that all classes in the city hold it to be a memorable occasion, and that we are engaged in something which may hereafter be spoken of, as I hope it may be for generations and for centuries, as a great thing to have been done by the inhabitants of Manchester in these days. There are two things shown by what has been done. We see what a prodigious growth there has been of population and of wealth in our time; and it shows, also, what vast force there is—force of liberality and force of generosity—in

freedom everywhere, and in municipal freedom wherever we see it.

Fifty years ago, or less, I suppose, this town was governed by an officer who went by the name of the Borough Reeve. I never saw a Borough Reeve myself. I do not know in the least what kind of person he was. He was something, however, that we have now forgotten—something we must admit to be very antiquated. He was the symbol of a patronage which was in some degree humiliating to a great town. In fact, he is now as extinct as that almost fabulous bird the dodo. You may still find him, it may be, at Madame Tussaud's or in the British Museum. But, instead of having a Borough Reeve to govern the great town of Manchester, under a very respectable Staffordshire squire, you have now my hon. friend who sits in the chair—the real, undoubted, and authoritative representative of the people in this great city. Then, with regard to this edifice, it is truly a municipal palace. Whether you look at its proportions outside or its internal decorations, or to the costly monument which is raised by it, there is nothing like it that I know of in any part of the United Kingdom; and I doubt whether in any of the great and famous old cities of the Continent of Europe there is in what they call their Hôtels de Ville, or what the London people call the Mansion-house, any building equal in costliness and grandeur to this. But then, after all, I am not sure that we may not run some risk of being a little filled with vainglory at what has been done. It is a weakness of men and of cities and of nations to be vainglorious after something considerable has been accomplished. We are here to-night, standing in the centre of a district more wonderful in some respects than is to be traced out on the map in any other kingdom of the world. The population is extraordinary. It is extraordinary for its interests and its industries, for the amount of its wealth, for the amount of its wages, and for the power which it exercises

in its public opinion on and over the public opinion of the nation. But still for all that, although the present and past have been so brilliant, I cannot help thinking of the fact, that the future is not without anxiety. Even, I may say that the present is not without its clouds.

I have an anecdote in my mind with regard to this matter, which I may relate here, for a friend of mine is now present who many years was concerned in it. I suppose it must be thirty-five years ago that my late friend, and your friend, Mr. Cobden, and also my friend who is here to-night, Mr. Henry Ashworth, and myself, were in Scotland on an expedition to preach the doctrines of the Anti-Corn-Law League, and in the course of our journey we stayed for a night or two with the late Mr. George Hope, of Haddington, who was one of the very first agriculturists in Scotland. He took us to see a famous ruin in that neighbourhood, which my right hon. friend the Lord Provost is very well acquainted with—the ruins of Tantallon Castle. It is the ruin of a stronghold that at one time belonged to the famous and powerful Douglas family. As I walked in among these ruins my friend Mr. Ashworth stopped me and turned round with a look of sadness and said, 'How long will it be before our great warehouses and factories in Lancashire are as complete a ruin as this castle?' I have thought of that many times. I thought of it then with sadness, as I think of it now. One thing is certain—if ever they come to ruin, they will never be so picturesque as are the ruins of Tantallon Castle. I think sometimes that we are not always aware of some of the perils which beset us. We import, as you know, most of the materials of our industry from distant parts of the world—from Egypt, from India, from South America, but mainly from the United States of North America. We use much of it in this country for our own consumption. We export a great portion of it to other countries—some of it to almost every country in the world, and we have to stand in every

country the competition of the industries of all their people. We have also to overcome, if it be possible, the barriers which foreign tariffs have erected against our trade; we are pursuing also a course at home which is not without its danger. We have been for many years past, as you know, gradually diminishing the period of time during which our machinery can work. We are surrounded by combinations whose object is not only to diminish the time of labour and the products of labour, but to increase the remuneration for labour. Every half hour during which you diminish the time of labour, and every farthing by which you increase the payment of labour beyond that which is the result of ordinary economic causes, have exactly the same effect upon us, in the general and unavoidable competition, as the increase of the tariffs of foreign countries. Thus we often find, with all our philanthropy in wishing the people to have more recreation, and with the hope that many feel that the workman should better his condition through his combinations, that we are ourselves aiding—it may be inevitably and necessarily—but it is a fact that we are aiding to increase the difficulties under which we labour in sending foreign countries the products of the industry of these districts; and we must not forget that great cities have fallen before Manchester and Liverpool were known,—great mercantile cities, on the shores of the Mediterranean, the cities of Phœnicia, the cities of Carthage, Genoa, and Venice. The poet says of Venice—

> 'Her daughters had their dowers
> From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East
> Poured in her lap all gems in sparkling showers.'

But what are the lines with which he concludes—

> 'Venice lost and won,
> Her thirteen hundred years of freedom done,
> Sinks like a seaweed into whence she rose.'

Therefore, when we are met in this magnificent hall to enjoy the generous hospitality of the Mayor and his friends, and

surrounded by the vast industries of this powerful district, let us not for a moment imagine that we stand on a foundation absolutely sure and immovable, or that we are not liable to the dangers which have overthrown and overwhelmed the great municipalities and cities and the prosperous industries of other countries and other times.

May I refer to just one other question which the public cannot well but think much about at this moment, and that is the condition of things in the Indian Dependencies of the British Crown. In India we have a vast territory and we have a vast population. It is a country, notwithstanding, which seems to me to have its perils for ourselves, and possibly the errors we permit, or of which we have been guilty, may some day or another inflict a very heavy penalty upon us. The people live under a burning sun. But if you will give water to the land, it will give almost all the fruits of the earth in great abundance; while, if you withhold the water, the ground becomes baked almost as hard as stone, and the whole country becomes a region of desolation and death. We have there been doing a great deal of late, but we hardly do anything except under pressure of some great emergency and calamity. The calamity of the Mutiny overthrew the India Company, and I hope from my heart that the calamity which has overtaken part of India, and which stirs the hearts of all the people in England, will have the effect of opening up a new and better policy with regard to what is needful to secure a continuous success to the agriculture of these vast regions. Our Government made railways; we have spent, I am afraid to say how much, but very much more than a hundred millions in making railways. They are of great service, and many of them are profitable and pay the investment which has been made in them; but when Government undertook to promote railways they did it largely from the idea that they would be of great service in a military point of view, and that when they could move one regiment by

railway it would be equal to three regiments which would have to be marched on foot through the country. I am not sure that we have not many more European soldiers there than we had before the railways were made; but it was because, in my opinion, there was a military question involved in it—which, of course, means the question of the safety of the country—that money was expended to so vast an amount on the railways and comparatively so little on works of irrigation. Now, I believe, and I think that no man can doubt, that however advantageous the railways have been, if we had spent one-third of the money spent on railways on canals of navigation and irrigation, the famines which during the last few years have swept away, or are sweeping away, some millions of the population, would not have occurred. The condition of the people would have been immensely improved, the production of the soil enormously increased, the traffic between England and India in its supply of articles we want would have been greatly enlarged, and its power from its greater wealth of consuming the productions of our industry would also have been far, far beyond anything we have hitherto seen.

Twenty years ago I paid a great deal of attention to Indian matters, as some of my friends here know. At the time I was very anxious that there should be more done for irrigation and navigation, but the railway interest prevailed mainly because it was also the military, or, what you may call the national, interest. Well, the railways have been made. I think now that if the Government would undertake in the course of the next six or ten years—it would easily be done in that time—to spend about 30,000,000*l.* in the making of canals for navigation and irrigation, they would by the end of that time have produced a change in India such as very few persons can form any adequate conception of. Just at the time when the Crimean War broke out Sir Arthur Cotton, then Colonel Cotton, came down to Man-

chester. My friend Sir Thomas Bazley and myself were chiefly instrumental in bringing him down,—the members of the Chamber of Commerce gave their assistance, and in the Town-hall, in King Street, Sir Arthur Cotton gave us a lecture. I have a book at home called 'The Indian Problem Solved;' in it there is a map not very much larger than this piece of paper, and on this map are placed a number of canals according to the plan which Sir Arthur Cotton himself had laid down. I believe it is calculated that the whole of these canals might have been made for the sum probably of 25,000,000*l.*, certainly not more than 30,000,000*l.* sterling, which, after all, is a mere bagatelle in a matter of this kind, because it is only 1,000,000*l.* a year in interest, and only three times as much as was spent in that miserable Abyssinian War. If there is some question of that kind, Parliament grants 10,000,000*l.* or 20,000,000*l.*, and the thing is done; they say the honour of the country is concerned. Can there be anything in which the honour of the country is more concerned than this, that we, whose fathers conquered India, with its 200,000,000 of people—can there be anything in which our interests are more concerned than, that we, their children, should, if possible, turn that bequest to the greatest account, and having received, we know not how or why, that great responsibility, we should endeavour, if possible, adequately to fulfil it? Almsgiving is often very good, but not always. Almsgiving now is general throughout the country on behalf of the Indian sufferers; let every man's purse be open as his heart is open, and let him give; but I tell him without the slightest hesitation, that though what he gives will carry its blessing with it now to some poor wretch in that distant country, still it will do little for the future. What you want is a new and a wiser and a broader policy, and that policy, I much fear, you will never have from the Government of Calcutta until the people of England say that it is their policy and must be adopted. In the midst, then, of our present position, with this gorgeous

banquet before us, in this magnificent hall, let us not forget our responsibilities, let us not forget the perils we may have to encounter; but let Manchester, of the very foremost of our great cities, let Manchester, as she has done in time past, contribute her share to that wisdom which in all time is the sure foundation of the permanent prosperity and of the true grandeur of States.

XXVI.

ROCHDALE, SEPTEMBER 25, 1877.

[On this evening Mr. Bright was asked to distribute the prizes to the successful students of the Science and Art Classes, held in connection with the well-known Co-operative Society of the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers. After distributing the prizes Mr. Bright made the following address.]

ALTHOUGH it is expected that on an occasion like this there should be a good deal said on education, yet I beg to assure you that I am not about to make an education speech. We are all, I think, very much agreed upon the long-disputed question as to whether education for what are called the common people be desirable or not. For my part I do not care to discuss that question to-night, even for a moment, and I may say that, on the whole, of late years I have found the reading of what are called education speeches rather dull and heavy work. But if we look back we shall find that on this question, as upon most others, very remarkable changes have occurred, and we now hold that to be wholesome and good which in past times eminent men thought to be almost wholly pernicious.

I found a curious passage in a very interesting work, the 'History of the Colonisation of the United States,' by Mr. Bancroft. He is describing the government of the Colony of Virginia about two hundred years ago, and he gives

an extract from a despatch or letter by Sir William Barclay, the Governor of the Colony, to the Government, or, perhaps, to the king, Charles II, at home. I will read you that despatch just to show the distance that we have travelled since that time. Perhaps we have taken much too long a time to travel it. He seems to have been discontented with the clergy of that day. We have not found them in this country, except latterly, very enthusiastic, I am sorry to say, upon the question of general education; but at present we are all pretty much abreast and travelling in the same direction, and, I trust, with an equal zeal. Sir William Barclay writes thus. He says:—

'The ministers should pray oftener and preach less, but I thank God there are no free schools nor printing-presses, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years, for learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them and libels against the best Government. God keep us from both.'

Fifty years before that time, in the Colony of Massachusetts, the Puritan Fathers, who created that State, had established an admirable and general system of education, which has given to the State of Massachusetts and its kindred New England States an authority in North America and an influence far beyond what they would have had from their numbers or from their wealth.

We will now come down a hundred years later—from the time of the Virginian governor to the time of the great Dr. Johnson, whom you will know chiefly as the writer of a great and valuable Dictionary of our language. In one of his writings he seems very much puzzled on the question of education, and he says, 'concerning the portion of ignorance necessary to make the condition of the lower classes of mankind safe to the public and tolerable to themselves,' that 'both morals and policy exact a nicer inquiry than will be very soon or very easily made.' He thought it was necessary for what he called the public, by which I suppose he meant the

higher and richer classes, that there must be a large amount of ignorance among what he called the lower classes—that is, lower in the scale of wealth—in order that those lower classes might be content in their position, and that the higher classes might be safe from their suspicions and from their attacks. Now, our object to-night is directed specially to the question, and to the promotion of art and of science. Let me tell you that there is hardly anybody who has had the same opportunities, perhaps, of observation, who knows less of art and of science than I do. I am not in the least qualified to make a speech on a question of this nature. Fifty years ago, when I was at school, people did not teach much about art or about science. I was at school in this town when I was a very small boy. After leaving this town I was at no less than four of what were called very respectable and sufficient boarding-schools in that day, but I never heard anything there, to my present recollection, about science, and very little about art. The last of the schools I was at was the one with regard to which I have most pleasant recollections, for it was situated in a very nice valley, and by the side of a very pleasant river, and studies were not forced upon us with undue harshness, but we spent a good deal of time in birds'-nesting and fishing in the river Hodder, chiefly for trout, and frequently during the summer months in bathing and swimming in one of the pools of that pleasant stream. I did not get much of what was called education. What I got was something—I had almost said far better, for I got, I believe, whatever store of good health I have had from that time to this.

But then, if one cannot understand science and art, one can at least admire them and value them. You have read poems, I have read many from which I derive intense pleasure, but I could not comprehend at all how the poet had originated those pictures which he describes, and I could not tell how it was, after having originated the pictures in his mind,

he put the language together so beautifully to describe them. I could not comprehend how it was done, but I could admire the poem and read it and feed my mind and spirit with the beautiful things which it placed before me; and so with regard to science, we may know very little of it, but we may have a great appreciation of it, and of all those persons who have advanced it and placed it at the service of mankind. It is less than a year ago that I was in this room speaking to the members of the working-men's club. On that occasion I went a little into history, and endeavoured to show how great changes had occurred in the legislation of the country during the last forty years, and how great was the gain from those changes to all classes of the community. Now, suppose we leave politics out of view altogether, but still keep to the same period, and endeavour to point out a few things in which great changes have been made, and in which scientific men have made gains for the world which are not exceeded by those which have been conferred by a more just and wise legislation. We are in a magnificent hall to-night, but what is there in it that is strictly new? The building itself is very much like buildings that you may see in other towns. It looks as if it were hundreds of years old from the style of its decoration. That picture at the end (a representation of the signing of Magna Charta) speaks of an event between six hundred and seven hundred years old; but there is something in this room that is entirely new and modern, by which we are enabled to see all the beautiful decorations of this hall and to see each other, and that is gas, by which the room is lighted. It was only the other day, comparatively, that there was no such thing as gaslight. I rather think that the first time I went to Paris—I suppose it must be forty years ago—that city was lighted by means of ropes strung from the houses on this side the street to the houses on that side, and between the houses there hung a miserable lamp, which, instead of enabling you to see, could barely

be seen. You may imagine what a great city like Paris or London, or even what this moderately-sized town of Rochdale would be if there were no gas, and you were lighted by miserable lamps so far apart that they could scarcely see each other, and the whole town were dim and dismal. It is not longer than the lives of some persons, probably, in this room since the first building in this country was lighted with gas. I believe it was Soho Ironworks, in Birmingham, and Mr. Murdoch, whose name has not gained the reputation which many men by lesser services have obtained, was the principal person in introducing gas as a practical gain to the country. It was about 1812 that Westminster-bridge was lighted with gas. Two or three years afterwards, so astonishing was the advantage, London itself adopted gas almost everywhere, and from that time it has spread with great rapidity, and now all the great buildings and in our towns almost all the houses are lighted with gas. It is impossible to describe in language the amount of advantage that this invention has been to us. We are indebted to science, which these classes are intended to promote, for another of those great advantages which we enjoy every night of our life, and which we are enjoying to-night, lighting up for us this beautiful hall.

It would be easy to go on step by step and show many great advantages we have gained. Take the question of steam navigation. What a wonderful thing that is, and what a wonderful progress it has made! I may tell the young men who are here connected with these classes that the person who first put an engine on board a boat and made it pass through the water without the ordinary power of sails and wind was himself an operative engineer named Symington, to whom immense credit is due for the invention. Now, I will tell you a little of my own experience. In the year 1836, about forty-one years ago, I went from Liverpool to the Mediterranean, and when I arrived at the island and town of Syra

we were surrounded by the inhabitants in boats, just as some of the early navigators were surrounded by the inhabitants of the countries they visited. Steamships were scarcely known, and for a long time we were detained afterwards in the city of Athens, being unable to get away because there were no steamers which could take travellers westward. It was two years later that the Atlantic was first navigated by steam, and some of you will recollect that in the spring of the year 1838 two steam-ships left this country to cross the Atlantic—one on a Sunday and the other on a Monday morning. When the Sirius came in there was the greatest excitement to see her come steaming in pouring out smoke from her funnel. The spectators knew that she had crossed the Atlantic, they knew it was a great thing, and while the whole city of New York was in excitement it was announced next morning that another huge steamer was also entering the harbour; and thus these two vessels, coming within a day of each other from ports in England, at once for ever settled the question of the possibility of the navigation of broad oceans by steam power, and from that time to this the progress has been rapid even beyond what could have been expected by the most sanguine inventor of that day. There is one Company now of which you have all heard—the Cunard Company—which has, I believe, not less than fifty steamships. I am told the Company have more than 1,000,000 tons of tonnage, and that they have more than 15,000 horse-power in their fleet of steamers, and that after traversing the Atlantic for thirty-five years they can say with a just satisfaction that not a passenger nor a single letter has been lost by any accident at sea to any one of their vessels. There are other companies which I might mention. There is another whose advertisements you see constantly in the papers—the White Star Company. Their vessels make the passage from Liverpool to New York and from New York to Liverpool with a speed which is extraordinary, and with a punctuality

that almost approaches the punctuality which marks the arrival of your express trains. A hundred years ago Captain Cook gained great celebrity from his navigation in the Pacific and the South Pacific oceans. Now those seas which he navigated with so much peril, and the accounts of which were so marvellous when he returned, are traversed by huge steamers every day of the year. Even the great rivers of China are navigated by steam-boats built in this country; and there is not a coast which is not visited, there is not a harbour, there is not an ocean which is not traversed by these proofs of human genius and power.

Now we come to another invention as wonderful, and which has produced, perhaps, as great results, and that is the invention of the railway. I was looking in the Store Library to-day at a map of the country, I was examining one for another purpose a day or two ago, and there is quite a new appearance upon the map. I recollect when there was not a single one of those black lines upon the map that you see now. At present the whole of Scotland and England and the greater part of Ireland are almost covered by these dark lines. They indicate where your railways run. But in 1830 there were no railways for the carriage of passengers. I was looking only yesterday at an old memorandum-book, and I saw a note in it that on a certain day I had walked from my house up to the railway station to see the train come in from Manchester with its passengers. It was a new thing the wonder of which to me has never ceased, and I think the power, the speed, and the grandeur of these great locomotive engines can never grow old, and that we can never regard them without wonder and without admiration. There are probably not many in this room who ever went to London in a stage-coach, but in 1832, the first time I went to London, I went outside a stage-coach called the Peveril of the Peak, and it started from Market-street in Manchester at eight o'clock in the evening—a four-horse

coach, admirably managed and horsed—and we arrived in London at five o'clock the next afternoon. It happened to be the very night when the House of Lords were discussing the second reading of the great Reform Bill, and during the 14th of April—I think it was as we were travelling along the road—some passenger observed something coming towards us, but still in the distance, and we all looked with great interest. We saw horses galloping and carriages coming at a speed which would quickly have left behind our coach if they had been going the same way. By-and-by we found they were chaises with four horses in each chaise, having two or three men inside, and they were throwing out placards from each window. These were express chaises coming from London, bringing the news to all the people of the country—for there were no telegraphs then—of the glorious triumph of popular principles even in the House of Lords. I do not know how long it sat the previous nights, but it was not till seven in the morning that the House divided, and the second reading of the great measure was carried by a majority of nine votes. It has always been to me a pleasure to think of the excitement this incident caused among us coach passengers when we found what was the business and the message of those gentlemen in the expresses. Then, I say, we were twenty-one hours in going to London. Now if you go from Manchester to London you are five hours on the journey. We paid for our place on the coach for London 3*l.* 10*s.*, I think; now we go by first class for 25*s.* When I left, the rain was pouring down, and I was outside the coach, and the rain poured down for hours; whereas now we all go under cover and as comfortably as if we were sitting in our own houses. This is a marvellous change, which we owe entirely to science. In my opinion the debt we owe to the engineers can never be repaid and never be over-estimated. Take George Stephenson and his son Robert Stephenson, Joseph Locke, Sir John Hawkshaw, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Har-

rison, and Mr. Brunlees; and if you go to others concerned in the wonderful changes in everything connected with metals, take Sir William Fairbairn, or a very old friend of mine now living—Sir Joseph Whitworth—one perhaps I should say not surpassed as a scientific mechanic by any man living. I say these men have rendered to their country and to mankind benefits which are not exceeded by those which have been rendered by the most eminent or the most just statesmen in any country. If I had time I should say a word or two for the directors and managers of our railways. They are constantly attacked—often, in my opinion, most unjustly. They are reviled often by writers in the press, but I say there is nothing in the whole world, in my opinion, to compare with the successful management of the railways of this country, whether you consider their speed, or their comfort, or their safety, or their cheapness, all that which they give to the nation; there is nothing in my opinion in the world that can excel it.

Now, there is one other thing that is much more mysterious and wonderful than any of these to which I have referred, and that is the electric telegraph. The engineer can tell you a great deal about gas, or a steamboat, or a locomotive engine, but it is wonderful how little he can tell you about the power which enables you to communicate through the wires. He can tell you how it is done, and he can do it. I believe he can no more comprehend it than you or I can. And it is a mode of communication, as you know, not only over land, but under the sea. By-and-by, notwithstanding the discords there are in the world, you can imagine all the nations brought into as free and constant converse and intercourse, to compare very great things with small, as a number of persons round a table. It is impossible to say yet to what extent the telegraph will be used, and how much it will tend to bring nations together and be a benefit to them in different degrees and different modes. Take the Atlantic cable. I

saw in the paper only to-day that one of the cables had received between 3,000*l.* and 4,000*l.* in the course of a week, and that another had received 1,500*l.* in the course of a day. Imagine the number of messages which must pass under the ocean a mile deep in the water—two miles, perhaps—for a cable to pay 3,000*l.* a week to its proprietors. See how the two nations are brought together. A great deal of that, in fact more than to any other man living, is due to an estimable friend of mine, Mr. Cyrus Field. He was here only two or three weeks ago, and I was discussing with him the question of the ocean telegraph. He has spent almost all his life—I believe he has traversed the Atlantic seventy or eighty times—in connexion with his efforts in promoting ocean telegraphs, and it is impossible to say how long it would have been before we should have had an Atlantic cable if it had not been for him, and impossible to measure the amount of good he has conferred upon the United States, and upon this country, and, by the success of the cable, upon all the rest of the world, because now there are cables to almost all countries. I had the pleasure to know, many years ago, one of the chief of the original inventors of telegraphy. I speak of Sir William Fothergill Cooke. The names, also, of Professor Wheatstone, and of Professor Morse in the United States, are names which must be for ever connected with this great and wonderful discovery. But I do not know when I might stop if I proposed to tell you of all the gains we have had from science and mechanics.

Take the printing-press. The printing-press was formerly a machine that printed but a few copies of anything in an hour, but now it is a machine which prints thousands of copies in an hour, and prints at the same time both sides of a newspaper, and produces a newspaper so cheap, now that the taxes are off, that every man may have it at a low price every morning. There is hardly anybody in ordinary work and ordinary wages who, if he has time to read a paper

every day, may not have one at a very small cost. Your news is brought to you also just as accurately and correctly as if you lived in a palace or were the richest person in the land. If you come to the science or the art, whichever you may call it, of photography, that is entirely new. Many of us who have lived a good while in the world have no portraits of our parents. Our parents passed away to the future life before this great invention was made, but now in every family parents can have portraits of their absent children; children can have portraits of their absent parents; we can have portraits, as no doubt most of us now have, of those who have loved us, and whose features we shall see no more here. And all this is brought into every home, not to the rich alone, but to the poor everywhere, for science is not a respecter of persons, but is good to everybody to whom it comes near and with whom it deals. And there are other matters. There is the invention we had not many years ago from the United States—the invention of the sewing machine. I consider that one of the greatest inventions of our times, and it has given, I believe, very much higher wages to persons who are employed in sewing and to sempstresses, and it has given many among them, no doubt, an ease and comfort to which they were strangers before.

At the last meeting at which I spoke I showed what political changes had occurred, and I have now been endeavouring to show what have been some of the scientific changes; and I want particularly to impress upon all the members of the Co-operative Society, that this science is the most just and beneficent of all the dispensers of good. It does not bring these blessings to royalty only, or to an ancient aristocracy only, or to rich people of any kind only, but it spreads its blessings over all the people, and the humblest is not excluded from them. Does not the gas shine with the same brilliancy in one of your cottages as it does here? Does not the steam-boat take one of you, although you may be living

upon your six days' wages for your six days' work, and you have not much to spare,—does not the same boat take you as rapidly and as safely across the ocean as it takes some man deputed by the Government of his country to some great negotiation in foreign lands? Does not the railway, on most of the lines at least, take the third-class passengers at the same speed at which even royalty itself travels? There are trains now, as you know, on many of the lines (I know not whether on all), by which all persons go at the same speed, and you see the Prince of Wales get out, or one of his brothers, or some person that from his wealth or rank you look upon as remarkable, but who has no special advantage in this respect. Science as applied to railways has come down to the humblest of the people, and has given them advantages which are far greater than what it gives to the rich, because the rich aforetimes had means of travelling which the poor had not; and though it has increased the power of the wealthy to travel, it has given to the poor a power which they did not before at all possess. So of the telegraphs. I will undertake to say that if any of you will despatch a message from here to any part of the world you like, however distant it be, it will go just as fast as if it was a message sent by Lord Derby from the Foreign Office, or a message from the private secretary of Her Majesty the Queen; and there is no possibility, as I understand, of one message overtaking another. It is so with the printing-press, and it is so with the invention of photography. You have your newspaper as soon as the richest and most powerful, and it is printed just as well, and it has all the news just as completely, and it is served up to you in the morning as early as your breakfast, and the rich can have no more. Even in the humblest cottage there may be portraits of those who are loved and absent, and there may be a little book in which all the members of the family are represented, and which it is often pleasing for the family themselves or for their friends to examine and to

admire. So that we find this, that science comes to us like the air and light, and the warmth and sunshine and showers. It is a gift of Providence freely to all His creatures.

Now, what is the object of these classes? It is to promote art and science. Art has much to do with decoration. Science has much to do with some of those questions that I have been touching upon. May I tell all persons here who take the slightest interest in the Co-operative Society, or in its science classes, or in its meetings, that although few may be able to discover great things in science, yet all may live to enjoy the gifts which science continually is conferring upon us. To the young these classes must be of great good. Mr. Willans has hinted, with a certain regret, that the members have not increased as he should have liked to see them, nor yet the number of members who have studied in these classes and passed. The numbers that have passed may have been a little diminished, perhaps, by a greater severity of examination. But that does not excuse or explain that there has been no recent increase in the number of those who have studied. Now, just let me ask the young men here to consider how very different is their position from that of their grandfathers. Fifty years ago your ordinary working hours were rarely considered less than twelve, and they were often more; now, the working hours of the general class of workmen are such that you may get home and washed and take a book, without the chance of its being soiled, soon after six o'clock, so that there are several hours each night that you may devote to some useful purpose.

I have wasted as many evenings as many of you, and I am not pretending to be better than other people, nor am I going to lecture you. We are all very much given to wasting our time; but what I have said can be done, and if you would go on from week to week, from month to month, and from year to year devoting your time to some useful study, you

would be amazed and delighted at the amount of knowledge you would acquire. There are many temptations for young men. One person said to me as I was about to attend this meeting that there were a great many of the young people here would rather go to a dog-race, or pigeon-flying, or the gossip of the bar parlour; but the fact is, I believe the majority of the people, and a very large majority, are decent and respectable. Now, what are the advantages you possess? In the library of your building I am told there are 25,000 volumes of books, there is a very handsome reading-room, and when I asked whether it was well attended, I was informed that it was often filled. Your society is called the Equitable Pioneers. It is a quaint and curious name, but I do not care about that, for there is not a young man in this room who would not benefit greatly by associating himself with the Co-operative Society for the purpose of gaining instruction. Within the last year there have been no less than 37,000 volumes taken from the library by readers. You have in your reading-room twenty-seven daily London and provincial newspapers, you have no less than thirty-three monthly magazines and periodicals of that kind, and no less than nine times more ponderous works published quarterly since the year 1857—twenty years ago. The Society has spent 2,600*l.* in books, and 4,300*l.* in papers and periodicals. You have, therefore, here the material for rearing up in this town a condition of intelligence and instruction and morality such as your fathers never possessed, and such as, I venture to think—I am sorry it is so—that very few towns in England are so fully possessed of and blessed with as you are.

I believe there is nothing so likely to guard young men from temptations and to make their homes happy—happy now while young, and happy hereafter, if they should become heads of families—as taking this very common advice which everybody gives you, and which you find very difficult to follow, but which I beseech you to try to follow. Look at

the heads I see before me, and strong heads that can do anything — stonemasons, carpenters, mechanics, engineers, weavers, spinners—every occupation there is in the neighbourhood. I see men who can work at all these trades so well that nobody in the world can do them better, and if they were to give a little of that energy and hardheadedness which they give to their ordinary work to the pursuit of knowledge in an evening, in twelve months' time they would find they had travelled a long distance, that their difficulties had become fewer, and that what had been hard work had become a pleasure. I do not say that from Rochdale we should have many great inventors; but great things would be done. It might remain, still, that you would never be rich, that you would always find it necessary to work steadily and honestly for your daily bread; but you would discover that God has given many of His best gifts so freely that the humblest are not shut out from the blessings which He has prepared for His creatures. I shall not take up more of your time but to say that I feel it a signal honour to myself that so many of you should have come here to listen to what must have been a common-place speech upon questions of this nature; but I came here at the urgent request of your committee. The Co-operative stores in this town have been a very great benefit to the population. Whether that benefit shall increase, be enlarged, and become permanent must depend, to a great extent, upon the minds and hearts, the resolutions and efforts, of this great assembly which I have been permitted to address.

XXVII.

ROCHDALE, NOVEMBER 7, 1877.

[A meeting was called at Rochdale on this occasion, in order that the inhabitants of the town might hear Mr. Chamberlain, M.P. for Birmingham, deliver an address on political organisation, and especially on the machinery by which the town of Birmingham has been able to baffle the political dishonesty which invented minority representation, and the unintelligent pedantry which acquiesced in the expedient. Mr. Bright took the chair on this occasion, and introduced the subject on which Mr. Chamberlain was about to speak in the following address.]

I HAVE been invited by the Committee of the Liberal Association to take the chair at this great meeting. I consented to come here with readiness, knowing the good object of the meeting, and knowing also that it was mainly for the purpose of listening to a speech from my honourable friend and colleague, Mr. Chamberlain. Mr. Chamberlain has, I think, on more than one or two occasions presided at meetings in Birmingham when I have been permitted to speak there, and therefore I think it is not unfit that when he comes to Rochdale, and for the first time, if it be agreeable to you, that I should take the chair on this occasion, and return to him the good which he has shown to me. I suppose that you are fairly acquainted with the special object of the meeting, which is to discuss and promote a better organisation of the Liberal party, and, as far as we are able to do it, to give some help to the general objects of that party.

You know of course that there are in the politics of this country two great principles. The one calls itself Conservative. I will not say what they have omitted to say—what it is that they intend to conserve, but judging from the past they wish to conserve or preserve a great deal which we have thought it necessary to destroy. The other party is that to which I suspect the great bulk of this audience belongs—that which calls itself the Liberal party. And I need hardly tell you that the objects of these two great parties are very different, and that the conditions under which they act in the country are also very different. The one—the Conservative—party appears always, or most always, to be acting for a class. Let it be a question of the franchise—in 1832 they were horrified at the extension of the franchise to 10*l.* householders, and from 1832 to 1867 they resolutely opposed every effort to extend the franchise and to give it generally to the householders in the boroughs. In that year they did concede a measure which they had always declared to be perilous to the country, and they conceded it doubtless because it was impossible to hold office, even for three months, at that time, if they had continued to resist it. If this Conservative party comes to legislate on any matters connected with religion its object is always to aggrandise the State Church. The great Nonconformist bodies, including one-half of the population of England and Wales, are never reckoned at all in their legislation, except it be to be insulted and injured. If they are dealing with the question of what is called national education, they endeavour by all the means in their power to give the control of the public education to the ministers and active associations connected with the Established Church. If there be legislation in connexion with the land, they are always endeavouring to continue as strict a monopoly as possible in the soil of the United Kingdom, and they always are, and have been recently, especially busy in transferring,

as far as possible, any taxes which have hitherto been paid by property in land to the general public in the shape of those taxes which press heavily upon and are paid largely by the great body of the working classes.

Now, the other party—that which we feel satisfied in belonging to, the Liberal party—legislates always for the whole people and for the general good. We bring no measures into Parliament that are exclusively for the advantage of Nonconformists. We have no idea whatsoever of dealing with the question of education so that we shall give exclusive privileges to the Nonconformist churches. If we legislate for the land, or if we propose to legislate—for we have yet to begin that legislation—we do it with the intention of making land as free a commodity as any other of the commodities in which our people may deal. There is one other difference that I may mention, and that is that the Conservative party is notorious for a constant resistance to every measure, or almost every measure, which the intelligence and the necessities of the country demand; and not only for a constant resistance, but, I am happy to say, in the long run for a constant failure in their endeavours. On the other hand, the Liberal party is notorious for its constant assault upon all the real grievances which old times have left in our legislation and in our administration; and not only for a constant assault upon those grievances, but a constant success in their efforts to remedy them.

But there is a great difference in the condition of these two parties, and that is really to a large extent the subject which ought to be, and probably will be, discussed to-night. The Conservative party has a solid and permanent organisation, to which I will refer by-and-by, which we do not possess, and to which at present, in the shape at least in which they have it, we have no claim. On the other hand, the Liberal party is diffused and dispersed throughout the country; and unless there come a time of great suffering, which welds

us together, or some subject which excites temporary enthusiasm, we are broken into sections and fight our opponents of the Conservative party at a great disadvantage. Now, how much good we have done under these, to us, unfavourable conditions of the conflict is a marvel to me whenever I think of it. How much good the Conservatives have resisted, and in how great degree they have failed —how much good we have attempted to advance, and how far we have succeeded, I say is one of the most wonderful things in the history of late years in this country. To you, I should say to our opponents, belongs shame and humiliation; to us a very high degree of satisfaction, and a just pride, when we contemplate the results of the last half century of the legislation and government of this kingdom.

I spoke of their solid and permanent organisation. I will mention one or two points which will make clear what I mean. Take the question of the land. Only two or three days ago I was turning over the pages of a publication known to many of you—the 'Financial Reformer.' I saw there a statement of the number of owners of land, and the quantity of land owned by them in acres in the various counties of England and Wales; in fact, I think in the United Kingdom; and I found it stated there that one-third of the whole of the land of the United Kingdom, being not less than 23,000,000 of acres—imagine that if you can, I cannot—the size of a kingdom—not less than 23,000,000 of acres belonged to 955 men. That is, if you were to draw a line across this hall and divide this great audience into two bodies—on each side that line, there would be as many persons present as there are owners of 23,000,000 of acres of land in the United Kingdom.

I do not object to anybody having a large estate if it is honestly come by. I do not advocate any system of legislation which shall deprive anybody of a single acre of land,

but I do advocate that land shall be divided a little more equally amongst the great body of the people. I object to laws which create and maintain a monopoly in this matter. It is by that monopoly that one-third of the whole land of the United Kingdom remains, for by the laws it almost necessarily must remain, in the possession of fewer than 1000 men or families. I need not tell you that these 955 persons are almost entirely of the Conservative party. It is so in Ireland, it is so in Scotland, and it is so in England and Wales. There are many well-known and bright examples of a more intelligent opinion, but the great majority of them are of the Conservative party; and through their power, and through their influence upon their tenants, who, unhappily, are subject and submissive, they exercise so enormous a power in the county elections that the great bulk of the members for the counties in England and Wales are representatives of Tory opinion and give constantly Tory votes in the House of Commons. Bear in mind that this great power over the land and those dependent on it—for the population of the counties is not represented—is a power which is always at work, which is solid, that requires no canvassing, and which brings a constant and increasing pressure upon the politics of the kingdom.

Now, let us turn to another branch of our institutions—the Church. I suppose there are in England and Wales nearly, perhaps quite, 20,000 ministers, clergymen of the Established Church. I reckon in this number all, from the bishops who live in palaces to the curates, many of whom live on a bare pittance, and in bare lodgings. These 20,000, more or less, are themselves portions of this great institution of privilege and monopoly, which ought to be an institution solely for the advantage and for the promotion of the Christian religion, but is to a large extent for the advantage and the promotion of one great political party. Three or four years ago a clergyman in the south of England wrote

to me and said that he thought that I was a little too hard upon them, that they were not so exclusively Conservative as I thought they were; that he was a Liberal, and he knew a good many other Liberal clergymen. Well, it would be a deplorable case, and it would be a dismal institution, if there were not to be found a few men whose intellects and whose hearts rose above the unfortunate circumstances in this respect in which they stand. But let us take our own parish. I have had my home in this parish for sixty years and more, and I have a fair memory of a good many things that have happened in it and of the people who have lived in it for nearly half a century, and yet, on ransacking my memory, I have not been able to remember more than one single minister of the Church of England, a clergyman of the Established Church in this great parish of ten or twelve miles square, with its 120,000 population,—I say I have not been able to remember, to recall to my recollection more I think than one clergyman who has ever publicly been known to act with or sympathise with the Liberal party in this district. I am not sure whether our much-esteemed friend Mr. William Molesworth is not the only clergyman of the Church of England who has shown a real, constant, wide sympathy with the population of this neighbourhood in its political aspirations.

The other day I saw a report of a charge—I think it is called—a speech, an address of a brand-new bishop—the Bishop of Truro in Cornwall. He was telling them what they ought to do, that is, his friends the clergy and the devout and sincere members of the laity of Cornwall, and the main thing which, as is reported, it appeared necessary for them to do was to complete their organisation, to contend with and, if possible, to suppress Dissent in that county. Cornwall is the most religious county in England. Cornwall is one of the great trophies left by John Wesley and George Whitfield,

And yet this new-made bishop, in the year 1877, when he knows that half the population in England and Wales have no connexion whatsoever with his Church, is arguing that the great thing they had to contend with, that which they have—it means this if the word was not used—to supplant, is the organisation and the position which Nonconformist bodies have attained in that county. I think that is very shocking, and that it proves beyond all question what a tendency there is in an established Church to fight for the Church rather than for Christianity, to fight for the supremacy of its own organisation rather than to look with favour and with gladness at the Nonconformist and free organisations which have been of such incalculable blessing to the county in which the Bishop of Truro lives.

I might go on further, and show how the professions unite themselves with the Conservative party. For instance, the military profession, among whom 25,000,000*l.* of taxes are spent every year. Of course I do not speak with regard to the private soldier or the private sailor, but am referring to those who hold official and high positions. Though there are many great exceptions, still we all know that the great bulk of that influence is given always to the Conservative party in the politics of the kingdom. Then we come to one other profession—the profession of the law. There are many exceptions, of course, as in the other case, but generally speaking, you will find that the lawyers as a body at elections throw their influence into the scale of the Conservative party. They are not generally in favour of any reform; and especially, as a rule, they are not in favour of any reform of the law. The laws of this country, in their complexity, in their entanglement, in their costliness, are a disgrace to a civilised people. Two hundred years ago Cromwell, who was no bad judge of these things, said, 'The law of England is a tortuous and ungodly jumble.' But you might almost as well ask a spider to

give up weaving his web, or to destroy the web he has woven, as ask the great body of lawyers to consent to the simplification and purification of the law. There is one other monopoly which I must not omit, and that is the monopoly of the dealers in intoxicating drinks. My hon. friend and colleague has paid a great deal of attention to these gentlemen, and I have no doubt he can say much more on the point than I can. I will content myself with saying that they are a monopoly which in past times to a great extent, and recently almost exclusively, have banded together, not only against reform of anything with which they and their trade are connected, but against all political reform that might be proposed by the Liberal party.

Now, we have in the country millions of persons who have no interest in these monopolies, or in any evil or any grievance, whose only wish is to have good laws, wise administration, just government in every part of the country and over every class of people. But then, a good many of them, as we all know, unhappily are ignorant. Many of them do not read much, and still fewer think very much; and upon them the constant pressure of the land, of the Church, of the publicans, of the professions, is brought; and of course a very large number of them, having no interest whatever in any of these evils, at the time of election will give their votes in favour of that which they ought to despise, condemn, and war against. But, leaving our opponents in the position which I think I have described, we must not forget that we have some things in our favour. We have grand principles, which make a party strong. We have a constant growth of population; we have a great expansion of trade; we have the lessons of time and of experience; and those give us strength and enable us to win great and constant victories even against the mighty powers which have been opposed to us.

But it is desirable that we should attempt some better

organisation of the Liberal party, and on some surer basis. You know how little chance a mob has against an organised body, whether it be an army or a body of police. A mob has no concentration, no union, no directness in its efforts. Even its passion fails to give it the necessary power, and it is so to a large extent with a political party which is disorganised, as the Liberal party has been to a very great degree. Notwithstanding all this, much has been done in our time, and there is a great deal in the future to which we are looking forward. But there must be union. Unless the country advances in freedom it is certain to go backward. The powers which I have described are always at work—their pressure is constantly felt. They are strong in Parliament and in the executive government, and they are strong upon the press. They have powers which we have not, and unless we organise with a view to resistance and defence the country is sure to go back, and we may soon lose some of the liberties we have gained.

I am speaking in a borough which, after all, with one or two little slips, has done its duty well since the year 1832. I recall to myself the names of the men who have had to speak in your voice in the House of Commons, and on every fitting occasion, to promote the principles you hold dear—Fenton, Sharman Crawford, Miall, Cobden—and your present member Mr. Potter. Let us then keep the flame alive. Let us, if we can, be as we have been in the past, an example to many other constituencies. I am honoured with being one of the representatives of one of the foremost constituencies in the kingdom. I consider it an honour to be one of a constituency like this, so many of whom I am now addressing, a constituency so well deserving the confidence which the constitution places in them, and who have so well endeavoured to promote good Government, and who are now here for the purpose of listening to a speech from my hon. friend and colleague. He has not been long in the House

of Commons, he is—what shall I call him?—a juvenile member of Parliament in comparison with myself. He was a small boy, I suppose, when I first entered the House of Commons in the year 1843, but outside the House he has done great service in his own great town, and there, where he is best known, he is best and most appreciated. I hope, in fact I believe, I cannot have a doubt of it, that when he comes before you to-night you will give him that warm and cordial, nay, enthusiastic welcome which you owe to every man who in a public position honestly and consistently works out, so far as he can, good government and freedom for the population of this country.

XXVIII.

MANCHESTER, DECEMBER 11, 1877.

[At this time Sir Arthur Cotton was on a visit to Manchester, and the Members of the Indian Association in that city convened a meeting in the large room of the Town Hall, with a view of hearing the opinions which Sir Arthur entertained as to the means of preventing famine in India for the future. Mr. Bright was invited to be present and to speak on the subject. The new buildings of the Manchester Corporation were used for the first time on this occasion. The allusion made in page 447 is to a speech in the House of Commons on June 24, 1858. Speeches, vol. i. p. 35.]

I THANK you, as I ought, for the kind words which the Mayor has spoken in my behalf, and for the cordial reception which you have given me. It is to my mind a very remarkable meeting. The place is remarkable, and the occasion is in accordance with the place. We are in the centre of this great city, which is the centre of a great industry. We are here on the principal market or business day of the week, and we have before us a very large number of persons who on ordinary occasions are engaged with their business, and are not meeting to discuss great social or political questions. I ask myself this—What is it that has brought these men together in this remarkable place at this remarkable time? Is it some common question which has excited your enthusiasm or your interest, or is it some question greater than any probably that has ever heretofore

been submitted to your attention? We are here to discuss matters interesting—intensely interesting—to the people of England, if they knew their own interests, and intensely interesting also to what we call our Indian Empire, which is a country so vast that nobody has any acquaintance with the whole of it; a country so peopled that no census can give us an accurate account of its populations; a country which has, according to the best authorities, a population of 250,000,000 men, women, and children, who owe directly and indirectly some sort of allegiance to the Queen of this nation. The population of India is five times the population of the whole of the rest of the British Empire, and we may consider for a moment how we came into this position in India. It is not by the ordinary course of a long succession that the Crown of England has power in India. It is not that we have held India by centuries of undisputed possession. Our power there is little more than a century old, and the empire has been built up by means which I am afraid have been instrumental in building up almost all great empires, by ambition, and crime, and conquest. We claim to be now what is called the paramount power over a population equal to one-sixth of the whole population of the globe, and we hold this rule by a mere handful—shall I say, of Englishmen?—well, of men from these islands, backed by an army of 60,000 British troops. With regard to revenues, we receive something like 50,000,000*l.* year in India, which is principally gathered from its people in the shape of taxes, but which includes also a considerable sum procured from the Chinese from a monopoly in opium. We claim the ownership of all the land, and the Government fixes, for the most part, what rent it chooses to receive; which is generally, I am sorry to say, the utmost it can compel. We impose taxes, import duties, as you know, stamp duties, and some other duties; but, above all, we levy a salt duty, one which is highly productive, but extremely oppressive, to the poor bitterly cruel,

to gather which we send the tax gatherer into the humblest hovel in that vast empire. But you must remember that all this great population has no voice on its own affairs. It is dumb before the power that has subjected it. It is never consulted upon any matter connected with its government. It is subject to the power that rules over it in a manner that cannot be said of the population of any civilised or Christian people in the world. We raise revenue; we create patronage; we pay salaries and pensions, and we trade extensively with the country. You have known, or at any rate you have heard in past times of the riches of India. In fact, within the last hundred years, whenever the word India was mentioned, there was a floating vision of vast wealth passed before the eye and the understanding. I recollect one of our poets—James Montgomery, I think—begins a poem in these words:—

'Blow, ye breezes, gently blowing,
Waft me to that happy shore
Where, from fountains ever flowing,
Indian realms their treasures pour.'

And yet there is nothing in the world more clear than this, that India is essentially a country at this moment of great and abject poverty, and that the reputation of its wealth has only been founded upon the fact that it is a country which marauders have always found it easy to plunder.

In this country about which I am speaking there have been famines of a destructive and appalling character, and we are met here to-day for the purpose of discussing how those famines have arisen, and whether it be within the power of human benevolence and statesmanship to put an end to them in future. England for the most part has taken no note of those famines. India is a long way off. It was a very long way when people went round by the Cape. It is far off on the map, although by the wire you speak with it in a few minutes, and you receive an answer in a few hours. But England took no note of this distant country until there

came the calamity of the mutiny, when England suffered greatly, and passed through a great humiliation—for it is a humiliation to any Government that its subjects, and especially that its army, should turn against it. But when the mutiny took place the East India Company fell. If we had discussed India, or the character of the East India Company, in the House of Commons twelve months before the mutiny, the President of the Board of Control, or what is now the Secretary of State for India, would have delivered you a speech an hour long in praise of the wisdom and success of the government of the Company. I took great pains to show that these praises were not deserved, and I urged for years that the Company should be abolished. When the mutiny came in 1857 there was nobody to say anything, or hardly anything, for the Company, and that famous old institution tumbled over at once, and it had scarcely a friend or a single element of power left in it.

We are now in view of another great calamity—the calamity of famine—and I trust that we shall find that not only Parliament but the whole people of England will be willing to give a fair and honest attention to the question that we are here to discuss to-day, and which must before long be discussed in many parts of the country, and also on the floor of Parliament. What are these famines? Some of them you have never heard of, or if you have you do not remember them. There was a famine in 1837–8, which affected 8,000,000 of people, 5,000,000 with great severity, during which no less than 800,000 persons died of famine, more than half as many again as all the men, women, and children of this great city in which we are assembled, and the people of England scarcely heard anything of it, excepting now and then in a paragraph extracted from an Indian paper. In 1860–1 there was another famine. There were 13,000,000 affected, 5,000,000 suffered intensely. The mortality, as far as I have searched for it, is not on record, but I do not think

there is any reason to believe it was any smaller than in the previous famine. In 1863 there came the famine in Bengal and Orissa, and one quarter of the population died in some of the districts. The total amount of the deaths was enormous. Nearly the whole of the labouring population was swept away over large districts of country during the pressure of that calamity. In 1868–69 occurred the great famine in Rajpootana and the districts around it. One hundred thousand square miles, or one-sixth of the whole area of the country, was more or less affected by this famine, and 1,250,000 persons are admitted by the Government estimate to have perished of hunger. In 1877, the present year, it is estimated that more than 500,000 people, that is more than all the population of this great city, have died, and those who die, or the figures of those who died, do not represent the whole calamity. There are multitudes who die afterwards, who suffer and linger, who know never again a day's good health, and whose names are not on the record which tells us of the mortality of the famine. And then there is the loss of cattle. It is enormous. The loss of cattle in a country altogether agricultural of course must be the loss of the principal source of wealth.

The loss of produce, the loss of revenue to the Government, the loss of trade, all this is absolutely beyond calculation, and if one could add all these losses together and show you how much it was, you would find that all the money which Sir Arthur Cotton proposes to have expended in the moments of his greatest hope—or, if you like, his greatest enthusiasm—would be a mere trifle to that which has been sacrificed by these famines, which might probably have altogether been prevented. Sir A. Cotton referred to the number of persons supposed to have died. I was reading the other day a very interesting pamphlet by Mr. R. Elliott, who has been a planter in India, and is well acquainted with many parts of the country. This was published several years ago. Mr. Elliott

said that within ten years more than 2,800,000, nearly 3,000,000 persons, had been proved to have died from famine, and this year we have added to the number another 500,000. Now, the question is, How long is this to go on? What are we to say of a Government which has all this passing under its eye from year to year, and all that I have described within the last ten or fifteen years, and makes no strong and resolute effort to meet it? Look at its effect upon the Government and upon the people. India is poor. Its taxation has almost reached its limits; it is so high that you cannot turn the screw a bit more. There has been very frequently and for many years a deficit when the annual expenses are made up. Bankruptcy is threatening the country. There is the loss of credit to the Government; and yet no Governor-General in India with his Council, no Indian Secretary in London with his cumbrous and burdensome Council, not one of these great personages who are connected with the Government of India, steps forward resolutely with intelligence and force and courage to say that these great calamities, so injurious to India, so perilous and humiliating to England, shall, if possible, for ever be put an end to.

Now we come to the question whether there be any remedy. There are some misfortunes of such a nature, that the moment you find the cause you find the remedy. If a man suffers from hunger you give him something to eat. I think Daniel O'Connell said, when some one complained that his horse was starving, 'Have you tried corn?' The calamity which you hear of in India is that famine is there, and that the famine arises from drought; that there is a lack of water, or at least a lack of water in the right place and at the right time. There is always soil, and there is always sun, and there is always rain; but the rain does not always fall when you want it, and it is not at the particular time just as much or as little as you want it. But if you have soil, and sun, and water, and human labour, you may have rich

harvests throughout a great portion of India. Now that is a very simple doctrine, which I suppose few people will be disposed to dispute. But with the rainfall there is some difficulty, because the rain comes down there sometimes in profuse quantities. It does not rain, as we say here, cats and dogs, but I suppose tigers and lions, or anything else you may use as an illustration. But sometimes the heavens are as brass, and there is no rain, not only for weeks but for months.

Now, what is the remedy? Everybody has known the remedy for centuries. If you had before you, as I have seen, an ancient map of the presidency of Madras, you would think there was no dry land for the people to live upon, the map is so marked with tanks. You will understand that what Sir Arthur Cotton means by tanks is not the sort of thing we call a tank here; but it is a large reservoir, sometimes of miles in extent, and like some of our greatest lakes. Well, this map of Madras is marked out with these tanks or reservoirs from north to south and from east to west, and it shows that the rulers of the people of those ancient days had just the same evil to contend with that we have, and that they manfully did their best to subdue it.

Our Government knows perfectly well what is the remedy, but what do they do? Whenever there is a famine they begin to think about some manner of irrigating that particular district. They generally wait until the horse is stolen before they lock the stable door. I give you an extract here. I quote from an interesting article in the *Fortnightly Review* by Colonel Chesney, who by many persons will be admitted to be a great authority. He says, 'The Ganges canal was the outcome of the great famine of 1833; the new project in the Doab of the famine of 1861; the Orissa works of that of 1866.' He says, 'Oude has escaped famine so far, and in Oude no irrigation works have been constructed.' And then he goes on to say that the Indian

Government is very like a father who spends a great deal on the doctor or the nurse, if his child is ill and ready to die, but in ordinary times does not take the smallest care of him whatever, or teach him anything with regard to the preservation of his own health. That is the policy which the India Company in past times pursued, and which the Indian Government is yet pursuing for the most part with regard to that very large child it has the care of—the 250,000,000 of people in our Indian Empire. Now, I have given you the opinion of Colonel Chesney. I might give you one or two others, but I will not trouble you with quotations, for I do not think the question requires it. Sir Charles Trevelyan, who is one of the most intelligent men who have been connected with the Indian Government, and who has been governor of the province of Madras, on hearing a paper read by Sir Arthur Cotton, said he was satisfied that with a thorough system of irrigation famines would be impossible in India. Speaking of what Sir Arthur Cotton had done on the Godavery and Kistna he says, 'If all India were treated in the same way, famines would be impossible.' Next I give you the opinion of Sir Bartle Frere, a very distinguished Indian servant of the Crown, who has now been sent out, as you know, as the governor of the South African dominions of the Crown—the Cape of Good Hope. He says:—

'It is the fashion to deny the facts regarding the results of the irrigation works on which Sir Arthur Cotton's calculations are based, but I feel certain that the more they are tested the more clearly will it be seen that in no other way can money be so advantageously expended with a view to future production and cheap supply as in great works of irrigation and internal navigation.'

Now, I have given you the opinions of three persons. I might keep you here an hour in reading the opinions of men almost equally distinguished, and to the same purport. So I take it for granted that when we have the judgment of past Governments—I mean the ancient Governments of

India; the judgment of our own Government of India, when a calamity occurs; the opinion of Colonel Chesney, of Sir Charles Trevelyan, of Sir Bartle Frere, of Sir Arthur Cotton, and I venture to say, also, the unanimous opinion of all the intelligent engineers who are connected with India, we must come to this one conclusion—that as we have found out what is the malady under which these people die, we have also found out the remedy by which they might, if it had been applied, have been kept alive.

They say that Sir Arthur Cotton is an enthusiast. Well, we have all been enthusiasts in our time, and the world would be a dull world if there were no real and honest enthusiasm in it. But Sir Arthur Cotton is not surpassed by any man in the Indian service for long experience and for great success in the works in which he has been connected and which he has undertaken. He has broader and grander views than some of his competitors, or some of his fellow-officers, or of those connected with the Government. But he knows that this is a great question, that India is a great country, that 250,000,000 of people are a great people; and therefore he thinks that a broader and a grander policy is necessary. Why is it that the Governor-General of India and his Council in Calcutta, and Lord Salisbury, and those who have preceded him as Secretaries of State for India in England, and his Council —why is it that they regard this question with so little favour? They are always on the brink of bankruptcy; the Government wrings whatever it can from the people—it takes every farthing it can get from them. It is admitted that taxation cannot be carried to a higher limit, and yet all that they get from taxation is not enough to spend, for they spend more than 6,000,000*l.* or 7,000,000*l.* which comes to them from the sale of monopoly opium in China. They have spent all this for years past; and besides spending that, they have incurred a debt, say of 100,000,000*l.* sterling.

Therefore they are always in terror of a bankrupt exchequer, and they turn their backs upon anybody who proposes that they should deal largely with any question, however important, if is requires that there should be a considerable or a large expenditure.

Now the question, in my opinion, is very much too great for the officials at Calcutta. You know that a new Governor-General of India is sent out from this country about every five years. As a rule, as far as my experience goes, these gentlemen do not know any more than the majority of their own class in society know upon this question. They begin, the moment they are appointed, to read 'Mill's British India.' I met—I do not know whether I have stated this before in public, but I recollect meeting a Governor-General with whom I was acquainted, just after he was appointed. I met him at Euston Station in London, and I observed that he had got a book under his arm, and was hurrying away. I spoke to him and said, 'If I were in the habit of laying wagers I would lay a wager that I could tell the name of the book under your arm.' Well, he looked surprised and amused, and said, 'What is it?' I said, 'I think it is Mill's British India.' He said it was quite true. He was beginning to read Mill, for he thought that as he was going out to India it was necessary that he should, if possible, rub up the information which perhaps in the lapse of years had passed from his mind. But when you come to discuss with the officials in Calcutta the question of railways there, they can open their minds to the large, and as they consider it the necessary expenditure; but the question of railways, in their opinion, is a totally different one from the question of canals, either for navigation or irrigation.

I think the question of railways is far more a question for the English, as a power in India, than for the native people in India. It is a great military question. It was supposed that with one regiment they could do the work in

maintaining order or suppressing insurrection with railways, that would require three regiments when there were no railways, though since they have made railways the authorities have half as many more men in India as they had when there were no railways at all. So that with regard to railways, whether they pay or not (and I am taking the statement of Sir Arthur Cotton with regard to the State railways that are being made, I have not examined the figures minutely myself), whether they pay or not, such is the fear of the authorities in Calcutta as to the peril connected with their power in India, that railways must be made for the sake of the permanence of that power, although they may not be worth one-twentieth part of what canals for navigation or irrigation would be worth in relation to the true interests, comfort, and prosperity of the millions of natives of the country. Why is it, if they have spent 100,000,000*l.*, or 120,000,000*l.*, and it is much more if you add the debt—if they have spent all that upon railways—and yet the vast bulk of India is not touched by railways at this moment—why should they hesitate as to a policy which, by spending one quarter of it, or 25,000,000*l.*, within the next few years, might redeem India from the disgrace which attends it from this neglect, and might redeem that vast population from the suffering which periodically assails it?

There are engineers in India—and where great works are to be done great engineers are found—though we cannot hope that Sir Arthur Cotton himself will ever again give his time and labour to works of this kind in India, yet I have no doubt there are other men, and not a few of them, who would have the ambition to tread in his steps, and who after their forty or fifty years in India might point to works as grand as his, which entitle him not only to the gratitude of the people of India, but to the high esteem and the grateful consideration of the people of England too. Thirty millions spent in this way, at the rate of

interest at which the English Government could borrow it, would be only about 1,000,000*l.* per annum; and at the rate at which the Indian Government could borrow, it would not certainly be more than 2,000,000*l.* per annum.

Well, if these canals could be made, if this cheap navigation could be provided—and recollect that the people of India do not want to travel by express trains, their time is not worth the expense of such travelling—they would be very glad to go even at half the speed of an ordinary train in India. Their produce, which is mostly what you call raw produce from the soil, does not require to travel at twenty miles an hour. They cannot afford to pay the cost of travelling at such a rate. If canals for navigation or irrigation were made upon some grand scheme determined by eminent and competent engineers, you would find the produce of nearly all the districts of India, all those not hitherto irrigated, would probably be doubled. Produce would be carried cheaply to the coast, and it would be distributed in the interior of the country, where there was partial scarcity, from where there was great abundance, and the surplus would come to this country and help to feed the growing population we have amongst us. The fact is that England and India would be both blessed by a policy of this kind. The population of India would be redeemed from poverty, and the population of England would have steadier and more constant employment, and a steady and, I hope, satisfactory rate of wages. But it is easy to say what shall be done. Some gentlemen—for whom our friends below are now busy with their fingers and their pens—some gentlemen who direct leading articles in the newspapers will say, 'How easy it is to say this and that shall be done;' and they will begin to point out difficulties, and show that these things are doubtful in themselves, and if they are not, the obstacles are such as at the present time, in the present condition of the finances of India, the Government cannot overcome.

I said just now, referring to the Government in Calcutta, that these gentlemen have a terror of expenditure before their eyes. I do not think half a dozen gentlemen in Calcutta—and who, by the way, spend I believe half the year at Simla—are capable of administering the government for 200,000,000 or 250,000,000 of people. I think it is an impossibility, which man in our present state of knowledge and morals will never be able to overcome, to govern one-sixth of all the population of the globe by half a dozen officers from this country—governing a people who have been conquered, and therefore must be less easy to govern; a people who are foreign, and therefore whose wants must be less understood. There never was anything in the world so monstrous as to believe that half-a-dozen officials in Calcutta can govern one-sixth of the population of the globe, comprising twenty or more different nations and speaking twenty different languages; and yet this is what we expect to have done, and what many people have believed has been well done by a Governor-General and half-a-dozen eminent civilians in the city of Calcutta. I believe there is only one person in India, so far as I have ever heard, who is in favour of economy, and he is the Governor-General. All the people with white faces, English, Scotch, Irish, and so forth, are nearly all in the service of the Government. I am not speaking now of the handful of merchants, but all the civilians, engineers, military men, everybody—they are all in favour of, and have an interest in, patronage, promotion, salaries, and ultimately pensions.

And then there is no public opinion which fights in favour of economy. There are two sets of newspapers—those, first, which are published by Englishmen, and these, being the papers of the services, cannot, of course, be in favour of economy. They assail me every time I mention India in a speech, if it is even only in a single paragraph, and no doubt

they will do the same for what I am saying now. Then there are the native papers; and although there are a great many published in the native languages, still they have not much of what we call political influence. The Government officials look into them to see if they are saying anything unpleasant to the Government—anything that indicates sedition or discontent, but never for the purpose of being influenced by the judgment of the writers and editors. The actual press of the country which touches the Government is the press of the English; and that press, as a rule, is in favour—and, of course, generally has been in favour—of annexation of more territory, more places, more salaries, and ultimately more pensions. Now I may say of these salaries and pensions that I believe there is no other service in the world, and never has been, in which salaries have been so high and pensions so large as those that have been given by the Indian Government, whether under the East India Company or under the present Government of the Crown. I may say further that their military expenditure, that consisted only of the maintenance of an army of 40,000 men before the mutiny, consists now of an army of 60,000 Europeans, although the mutiny was subdued, I believe, before a single fresh soldier had landed in that country from this.

It may be said that I am no authority on this subject. I admit it. I admit that the persons who are out there—the Governor-General and his principal ministers, and officers of the army—possibly they may all have opinions that are more worth your considering than mine; but I state these facts, and I say that a Government put over 250,000,000 of people, which has levied taxes till it can levy no more, which spends all that it can levy, and which has borrowed 300,000,000*l.* more than all that it can levy—I say a Government like that has some fatal defect which at some not distant time must bring disaster and humiliation to the Government and to the people on whose behalf it rules.

I have nearly finished what I have to say, but I want to make one reference to what took place nineteen or twenty years ago when the Government of India was changed. At the time when the second reading of the bill was before the House—a bill I supported in every stage—I ventured to address a speech to the House of Commons on the general and broad question of our Government in India. I said then that I did not believe, as I have said now, that a Government in Calcutta could ever efficiently direct the affairs of that country or legislate for it; that it could not do its duty to nations speaking twenty languages, comprising, as it is said, now more than 200,000,000 of people—one-sixth the population of the globe. I argued that it was necessary, and would some time become imperative, that the Government of India should be so changed that it should be divided into five or six separate and entirely independent presidencies; that by that means the government of every district should be brought nearer to the people; that you would not have the Government of Madras contending constantly with the Government of Calcutta, and the Government at Bombay being unable to do many things it would like to have done because the Government at Calcutta would not consent; that if you would divide the country into different presidencies, and make each a separate and independent state in itself, with the management of its own government, with its own Council, you would bring the government home to the people. And while the Government would necessarily or probably be much better, you would teach the people of these presidencies to consider themselves, as generations passed on, as the subjects and the people of that state.

And thus if the time should come—and it will come—I agree with Lord Lawrence that no man who examines the question can doubt that some time it must come—when the power of England, from some cause or other, is withdrawn from India, then each one of these states would be able to sustain

itself as a compact, as a self-governing community. You would have five or six great states there, as you have five or six great states in Europe; but that would be a thousand times better than our being withdrawn from it now when there is no coherence amongst those twenty nations, and when we should find the whole country, in all probability, lapse into chaos and anarchy, and into sanguinary and interminable warfare. I believe that it is our duty not only to govern India well now for our own sakes and to satisfy our own conscience, but so to arrange its government and so to administer it that we should look forward to the time—which may be distant, but may not be so remote—when India will have to take up her own government, and administer it in her own fashion. I say he is no statesman—he is no man actuated with a high moral sense with regard to our great and terrible moral responsibility, who is not willing thus to look ahead, and thus to prepare for circumstances which may come sooner than we think, and sooner than any of us hope for, but which must come at some not very distant date. By doing this, I think we should be endeavouring to make amends for the original crime upon which much of our power in India is founded, and for the many mistakes which have been made by men whose intentions have been good. I think it is our duty, if we can, to approach this great question in this spirit, and to try rightly to discharge the task committed to us, as the Government and rulers of the countless and helpless millions of that country. If we seek thus to deal with those millions, and men in after ages condemn our fathers for the policy which for the time bound India to England, they may award praise to us and to those who come after us for that we have striven to give them that good government and that freedom which He who is supreme over all lands and all peoples will in His own good time make the possession of all His children.

XXIX.

BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 13, 1878.

[The annual meeting of the members of the Borough of Birmingham was held this year at a somewhat earlier date than usual, in consequence of the fact that the session of Parliament began at an unusually early period. Mr. Bright took occasion to dwell on the menacing appearance of affairs in Eastern Europe, and to contrast the popular sentiment which led to the Crimean War with the general determination of the English people to take no part in the existing complications.]

THIS meeting, as you know, has been called some days earlier than was some time ago intended, and you know, also, that Parliament has been summoned about three weeks before the usual time. It is because Parliament has been summoned so early that this meeting has been called so early. In ordinary times the summoning of Parliament creates a considerable interest in the country, but, on the whole, I think it is an interest rather of a pleasurable kind. On this occasion the announcement that Parliament was to meet on the 17th of January had the effect of creating great anxiety; in some cases I have heard it described as consternation, and in all the centres of trade it has caused a certain depression which has been sensibly felt. I am driven to the conclusion, at which I think a large portion of the people have arrived, that the cause of all this is not a fear of Parliament, but a want of confidence in the Administration. We have been passing through something like a crisis, and we have had no decisive voice from the Government. In point of fact,

if one body of men has said that the Government has spoken in a particular way, the next body of men that you meet would tell you that the Government intended something entirely different. Of one thing, however, we may be quite sure, that the question which fills the mind of the people at this hour, and which has filled it for a long time back, is the great and solemn question of peace or war—and I doubt whether it would be possible to submit to any people a greater question than that.

There are many in this hall who remember a period, about twenty-three years ago, when the same question was submitted to the nation which the nation at this moment is considering, and that is, whether peace or war is the true policy and the true interest of this people. At that time the conclusion to which the people came was a conclusion in favour of war. They followed a Government that, unwisely as I thought then, and as most people think now, threw them into war. I think we may take some lesson from that war. I read a short time ago in a very influential newspaper—a newspaper which had supported the war of 1854—that it was a pity to go back at all to that question, that circumstances had entirely changed, and that men who were in favour of that war might very justly and properly be against a repetition of it. Now, for my share, I believe the arguments at the present moment for war are as strong as they were in 1854—and in point of fact, as I believe the war then had no just argument in its support, so I think that now there is no sound argument that can be brought forward to induce this people to countenance any entrance into the existing conflict. As to not going back to the past, what is common with individuals? Nothing is more common and nothing more wise than to look back. One of our poets has said:—

> 'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours
> And ask them what report they bore to Heaven.'

And how does a man become wiser as he grows older but

by looking back upon the past, and by learning from the mistakes that he has made in his earlier years? And that which is true of an individual must surely also be true of a nation with regard to its foreign policy.

At that time the public mind was filled with falsehoods, and it was in a state which we might describe by saying that it became almost drunk with passion. With regard to Russia, you recollect, many of you, what was said of her power, of her designs, of the despotism which ruled in Russia, of the danger which hung over all the freedom of all the countries of Europe. And the error was not confined to a particular class. It spread, from the cottage to all classes above, and it did not even spare those who were within the precincts of the throne. It was not adopted by the clergy of the Church of England only, but by the ministers of the Nonconformist bodies also. The poison had spread everywhere. The delusion was all-pervading. The mischief seemed universal, and, as I know to my cost, it was scarcely worth while to utter an argument or to bring forth a fact against it. Well, we had a war for two years, and we know what was its result; at least we know something of it We know that the naval arsenal at Sebastopol was to a large extent destroyed; that the Russian fleet was sunk in the harbour of Sebastopol. We know that when the treaty of peace came to be negotiated in 1856, Russia was forced to consent to a limitation of her fleet in the Black Sea, in order that she might never in future have a fleet that could menace the security of Turkey. Now, there was a certain cost that was necessarily paid for these things. Some people consider that the cost, when they are going into a war or when they are in it, is not of much consequence. I take a different view. I think the loss of 40,000 men in the prime of life, in their full powers—40,000 men killed in battle, dying from wounds, dying from horrible maladies in horrible hospitals—I think that is something, and I think the payment of 100,000,000*l.*

sterling—and that war cost us far more—is a serious thing for a country where there are so many poor people and so many families who live only to-day on the produce of the labour of yesterday. But then the loss we suffered was a very small loss compared to the whole loss. I saw the other day a note in a work to which I will refer by and bye, which said that 90,000 Russians were buried on the north side of the city of Sebastopol during that siege, and it was stated in the House of Lords—I think by Lord Lansdowne during the war—that up to the time of the death of the Emperor of Russia—the Emperor Nicholas—240,000 Russians had died or been killed, and it is stated upon good authority that the whole loss in men to the Russians during that two years' war was not less than 500,000. So that by adding our loss, and the French loss, and the Turkish loss, and the Sardinian loss, Mr. Kinglake reckons that the whole cost of the two years of that war was little if any less than 1,000,000 human lives.

Now, it cannot be wrong, and it cannot be unwise, that we should look back and see what that war cost and what it gained. The result of it was that Russia, for the time and in that particular part of her empire, in the Crimea, was vanquished, and a treaty of peace was agreed to at Paris in the year 1856. Now I want to show you just for a moment how mistaken were some of the opinions that were expressed at the time. I will only give you two little extracts. In February of 1854 the *Times* newspaper, which may be taken to be a wide representation, a fair representation, of a vast amount of opinion in this country, said—

'To destroy Sebastopol is nothing less than to demolish the entire fabric of Russian ambition in those very regions where it is most dangerous to Europe. This feat, and this only, would have really promoted the solid and durable objects of the war.'

Now, Sebastopol was destroyed, and the Russian fleet then existing was sunk by the Russians to bar the entrance to the harbour of Sebastopol, and Russia was limited for the future

so that she should never have a fleet that could be a menace or be any danger to Turkey. Well, the *Times* was not the only authority which made a statement of this kind. There is a work, published lately, to which I will for a moment refer—that is, the third volume of the 'Life of the Prince Consort.' It is a book which I have read with intense interest, many parts of it with a painful interest. It is a book which gives you an exalted and, I believe, a true picture of the greatness, and the nobleness of the character of the late Prince Consort. It is a book to which no doubt her Majesty the Queen has contributed the main portion of the facts and of the contents. In this work she has built up a monument which probably will last as long as our language of the greatness and the nobleness of the Prince. I doubt not it will last longer than any of those monuments of bronze or of marble by which it has been sought to commemorate his name and his character.

Well, in this book there are things I have said of painful interest. I have seen some criticisms upon it which go the length of saying that they think the book had better not have been published now, as it is calculated to excite unfriendly feelings to Russia. I have learned rather a different lesson from it. I think it is impossible for anybody of intelligent and impartial judgment to read the book through without coming to the conclusion that the occurrence of that war was an enormous error on the part of our statesmen, and that we are bound now by all regard for our country utterly to condemn it. I will give you just one paragraph from one of the Prince's letters, or, rather, from a memorandum that was submitted to the Government, I think in 1854. He was referring to certain expectations held out to the House of Commons by Lord John Russell as to what the war should result in, and he says:—

'I find that the impossibility of allowing Russia to retain her threatening armaments in the Crimea was one of the most prominent of these expectations

and the one which gave most satisfaction to the House. Now that vast treasure and the best English blood have been profusely expended towards obtaining that object, the nation has a right to expect that any peace contemplated by the Government should fully and completely realise it.'

He admits afterwards during the negotiations that the peace was not such a peace as they would have wished to have had, but it was a peace which was much better than continuing the war with the complications there were then in Europe. But what happened when you had destroyed Sebastopol, and when the fleet was sunk, and when you had limited their fleet in the future by the Treaty of Paris? If you will step over to the year 1871 you will find that the main article of the treaty —the limitation of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, the article to which the Russians were, I suppose, more opposed than to any other, because they considered it was more humiliating—that article was surrendered by our Government and by other Governments of Europe — I will not say actually without remonstrance, though I think I might almost say so, but without any strong remonstrance, and without anything like a blow; so that everything has failed. You destroyed a large number of lives, you spent the money, and you disturbed the peace of Europe, and the end of it was that nothing whatsoever was gained, because fifteen years afterwards everything was relinquished, or nearly everything, for which war had been waged. The Russian fleet is no longer limited in the Black Sea. Turkey, for which you made war, is not only not safe, but is in much greater danger than she ever was before; and it is obvious, from what we have seen, that, in comparison with Turkey, Russia is just as powerful as if the war of 1854 had never taken place, and at that time we had, as you recollect, a great ally in the Emperor of the French.

Now, I should like to tell you what sort of an ally he was; fortunately we have not one of that kind now. France never was in favour of the war. The Emperor went into the

war, not because he cared about Turkey or cared about Russia, but because he wanted to associate himself with respectable old monarchical institutions—with a respectable old monarchically-governed country. He thought that some things that had taken place in his career might be forgotten, and that he would come out able to enter the very high society of the sovereigns of Europe. Now what the Prince says about this is as follows: writing to his uncle Leopold, the late King of the Belgians, in December, 1855, he says, 'I really believe there is not a single soul in France who ever gave himself the smallest concern about the maintenance of the Turkish empire.' And he says further, in the year 1856, in February, 'We know that England is hated all over the Continent, that even in France it is the Emperor, and the Emperor alone, who is with us body and soul;' and he added, 'Our position in the Conference'—the Conference preceding the treaty of peace—'will be one of extreme difficulty, for, except the Emperor Napoleon, we have no one on our side.' Therefore, whilst we were fighting the despotism of the Emperor Nicholas, we had as our principal ally the despotism of the Emperor Napoleon, and we had none of the sympathy of that great nation the French. More than 40,000 Frenchmen laid down their lives in the Crimea in alliance with us for a cause in which they had no interest, and in which their country had no sympathy.

At that time Europe was not with us, and, as you know, Europe is not with us now. In 1855, in May, the Prince says this: 'The Crimea was chosen by France and England, forsaken by the rest of Europe, as the only vulnerable point of attack,' and he says further, in 1854, 'If there were a Germany, and a German sovereign in Berlin, it [that is, the calamity of this war] would never have happened.' There is now a Germany, and there is a German Emperor in Berlin, yet the war has not been prevented. You will see, therefore, from this slight sketch that there is nothing but failure,

nothing but disappointment in this page of the history of our country; and I want to ask you to-night, and to ask all those of my countrymen who may condescend to read what I am saying, I want to ask them whether they are willing to write such another page in our history—what shall I say?—shockingly terrible and bloody, and as utterly fruitless? Forsaken by Europe! We are forsaken by Europe now. Germany is not with us, Austria is not with us, Italy is not with us, France is not with us—we are alone. We only are constantly meddling, constantly doing or saying something which is supposed to be pleasant to the Turk, and which it is hoped, some people say—which it is often hoped—may be unpleasant to the Emperor of Russia.

Now I must ask you to consider for a moment why it is that we are in this position, so different from the position of the other nations of Europe. What interest have we at the east end of the Mediterranean which the other nations of Europe have not? We have only one point of interest, and they have it too, only we have it in a greater degree, and that is in the constant free maintenance of the passage through the Suez Canal. We have a vast dependency in India, and, therefore, in regard to military passage, and also in regard to trade—we, I suppose, furnish nearly three-fourths of all the shipping which passes through the canal—we have a greater interest in the canal being kept open than any other country in Europe has. That, of course, I admit. What a strange history has that canal. It is enough to teach us that we ought to examine carefully the declarations of great statesmen and Prime Ministers before we adopt a policy which they recommend to us. I recollect hearing Lord Palmerston denounce that canal. He condemned it as a thing not only of no advantage, but rather to be disliked by England; and he did not believe, if it was ever made, that it could be kept open. And he quoted, I think, the opinion of a distinguished railway engineer with a view

to strengthen his argument. The consequence was that the canal was made almost entirely by French money, through the energy of M. Lesseps, who is a very eminent Frenchman, and I am not sure whether a single share in that company was held originally, or has been held from the beginning, by any native of this country.

I maintain that all Europe is interested in the canal, and all Europe would protest against any power, be it the Khedive of Egypt or the Sultan of Turkey, or perhaps what is most unlikely of all, the Czar of Russia, that took any steps to prevent the free passage through the canal, or even dreamed of doing so. As a proof of it, it is, I believe, well known that all the Powers of Europe would be willing to combine with us and with the French company and with France for the purpose of declaring this canal not only a great national or European but a great world's work, and that under no conceivable circumstances shall any Power, or combination of Powers, be permitted to interfere with it. M. Lesseps, the French promoter of the canal, has over and over again made suggestions of this kind. They have been made to our Government, and I think it is a great misfortune, and have always thought so, that that plan was not adopted, and that the canal was not put in a condition of safety. I think it is in a condition of safety now; but I mean in a condition of safety so clear and distinct and unquestionable that nobody could make use of it for the political objects for which it has been made use of lately. Now, why is it we cannot do this, why is it that at this moment, when talking about the canal in connection with Russia, that Mr. Cross in the House of Commons, among the interests he specified as those which England must maintain, mentioned this interest of the canal? I have heard a very eminent person on his side of the House say, and acknowledge to me, 'As for the canal, I think that of the two the canal is in rather more danger from Turkey than it is from Russia.' All this arises from an ignorance

and, in some quarters, an ignorant jealousy of Russia. That ignorant jealousy has existed in this country for forty years past.

I was reading the other day a book of singular interest to me, the memoirs and correspondence of the late Senator Charles Sumner, a Senator of Massachusetts, in the United States. Charles Sumner was a personal friend of mine, and he corresponded with me for many years. In looking over his memoirs I came upon what I thought was a remarkable passage, which you will permit me to read to you. It is written in one of his letters from England in 1839. It was just previous to that time that there had been so much excitement in this country about Russia, and some people had really so nearly approached to a condition fit for Bedlam that they believed that the Russians were likely to come through the Baltic and to invade the east coast of England, and they persuaded the Government of that day—always too ready to be persuaded on things of this kind—to add 5,000 men to the navy in order that the panic might be put an end to. It is like putting a plaster upon a sore. When people get into a panic of this kind they vote two millions or five millions of money, five thousand men to the navy, or five thousand men to the army, and then go to their beds and sleep soundly. All there is in it is that next morning they have the tax-gatherer, and they pay. At that time there was living in England a very eminent man, the late Lord Durham. He was a member of the Reform Cabinet; he was one of the members of the committee of that Cabinet who drew up the first Reform Bill. He was a man of very Liberal views; he wished the Cabinet of Lord Grey not to give us a 10*l.* franchise, but household franchise, and to accompany it with the ballot. I will tell you what sort of man he was. He had been ambassador at the Court of the Czar, at St. Petersburg, and Mr. Sumner says this of him,—'I ventured to ask him what there was in the present reports with regard to the

hostile intentions of Russia towards England.' 'Not a word of truth,' he said, 'I will give you leave to call me idiot if there is a word of truth.' He said that Russia was full of friendly regard for England, and he pronounced the late Mr. Urquhart, who died during the last autumn, somewhere in the south of France, who was then going about the kingdom preaching against Russia, a madman. Well, I have known Mr. Urquhart in the House of Commons. I would not like to say a word against him now that he is not here to answer for himself, but this I may say without wrong, that he was a man so possessed of certain notions that it was scarcely possible to believe him in a condition for fairly reasoning upon them. He believed that the Czar Nicholas managed the whole world by his diplomacy; he believed Lord Palmerston was bribed by the Russian Government to sell the liberties of Europe and the interests of this country to Russia; he believed—and I have heard him say it in the most positive manner—that the war in the Crimea was waged, not to save Turkey, but to place Turkey in the hands of Russia, and that if we would leave Turkey alone, and leave her to fight Russia alone, Turkey was perfectly safe, and Russia would be easily and finally vanquished. These were the views of Mr. Urquhart, which I believe he held honestly, for he devoted years of his life to preaching them, and Lord Durham said that Mr. Urquhart, in preaching them, was acting like a madman, and was utterly ignorant of the true state of things in Russia.

No nation, I believe, has been in disposition more friendly to this nation than Russia. There is no nation on the Continent of Europe that is less able to do harm to England, and there is no nation on the Continent of Europe to whom we are less able to do harm than we are to Russia. We are so separated that it seems impossible that the two nations, by the use of reason or common sense at all, could possibly be brought into conflict with each other. We have India, and men tell you

that India is in jeopardy from Russia. I recollect a speech made last session by Mr. Laing, who has been out to India as Financial Minister, that was conclusive upon that point. But there is one thing that Russia can do in India, and that may be troublesome to us in another way, not in the way of war or of conquest, but in the way of certain irritation and trouble. You persuade the people of India by the writings of the press and the speeches of public men in this country, that we run great hazard from the advance of Russia, and if you have enemies in India of course you feed their enmity by this language, and you make them, if they wish to escape from the government of England, turn naturally and inevitably to Russia as the Power that can help them. The interest of this country with regard to Russia in connection with India is an unbroken amity, and I am sure that that unbroken amity might be secured if we could get rid of the miserable jealousy that afflicts us.

I thought some time ago that we were approaching, and I trust still we are approaching, a better time. The present Emperor of Russia is not the one with whom we made the war. He is a man not given to military display. He is a man whose reign before this war was signalised chiefly by the grand act of the liberation of twenty millions of his people. He at least was willing to forget the unfortunate past. He consented that his only daughter, the loved child of his heart, should marry the son of the English Queen. And I thought that this was a great sign of a permanent reconciliation, and a very blessed promise of a prolonged peace; and although that has not borne in this political respect all the fruit one could have wished for, still I am delighted to believe that there is a great change growing, and a change for the better, and a change which I believe will be accelerated by what will take place when this unfortunate war comes to an end.

There are still the traditions of the Foreign Office. I once

expressed—I was very irreverent towards such an ancient institution—the wish that the Foreign Office might some day be burned down; and at least, correcting myself, that if it should be burned down, that I hoped all its mad, and baneful, and wicked traditions would be burned with it. But these traditions still linger in the Foreign Office, and Lord Derby—to whom they are foreign—endeavouring to fill that eminent office, I believe with a true intention to serve his country, and to do right—has been made the victim of the traditions he finds in the office which he has filled for the last four or five years. But I say the heart of the nation is gradually changing. I met at dinner at a friend's house in Salford only the night before last, an old friend of mine, and he came up to me and said, 'Do you recollect me twenty-three or twenty-four years ago? You know I walked down Market-street with you that day when you came out of the Town Hall where you had been hissed and hooted and maltreated, and where you were not allowed to speak to the constituents you were endeavouring to serve, and when you were not allowed to pass down the street without gross insult?' Well, now, a man may have an opinion in favour of peace, and the 'dogs of war' will scarcely bark at him.

But still we cannot disguise from ourselves the fact that there is something of a war party in this country, and that it has free access to some, and indeed to not a few, of the newspapers of the London press. If there is any man here who thinks the question of our policy doubtful, if there is any man in the country who shall read what I say now who is in doubt, I ask him to look back to the policy of twenty-three years ago, and to see how it was then tried, and how it succeeded, or how it failed. The arguments were the same then exactly as they are now. The falsehoods were the same. The screechings and howlings of a portion of the press were just about the same. But the nation now—and if nations learned nothing, how long could they be sustained?—has

learned something, and it has risen above this. I am persuaded that there is a great difference of opinion as to Russian policy in the main, or Turkish policy in this war, and men may pity especially the suffering on the one side or the suffering on the other—for my share I pity the sufferings of both sides,—and whatever may be our differences of opinion, I think it is conclusively proved that the vast bulk of all the opinion that is influential in this country upon this question leads to this—that the nation is for a strict and rigid neutrality throughout this war.

It is a painful and terrible thing to think how easy it is to stir up a nation to war. Take up any decent history of this country from the time of William III. until now—for two centuries, or nearly so—and you will find that wars are always supported by a class of arguments which, after the war is over, the people find were arguments they should not have listened to. It is just so now, for unfortunately there still remains the disposition to be excited on these questions. Some poet, I forget which it is, has said:—

> 'Religion, freedom, vengeance, what you will,
> A word's enough to raise mankind to kill;
> Some cunning phrase by faction caught and spread,
> That guilt may reign, and wolves and worms be fed.'

'Some cunning phrase by faction caught and spread' like the cunning phrase of 'The balance of power,' which has been described as the ghastly phantom which the Government of this country has been pursuing for two centuries and has never yet overtaken. 'Some cunning phrase' like that we have now of 'British interests.' Lord Derby has said the wisest thing that has been uttered by any member of this Administration during the discussions on this war when he said that the greatest of British interests is peace. And a hundred, far more than a hundred, public meetings have lately said the same; and millions of households of men and women have thought the same. To-night we shall say 'Amen' to

this wise declaration. I am delighted to see this grand meeting in this noble hall. This building is consecrated to peace and to freedom. You are here in your thousands, representing the countless multitudes outside. May we not to-night join our voices in this resolution, that, so far as we are concerned, the sanguinary record of the history of our country shall be closed—that we will open a new page, on which shall henceforth be inscribed only the blessed message of mercy and of peace?

XXX.

ROCHDALE, APRIL 19, 1878.

[On this day Mr. Bright presided over the annual conference of the Sunday-School teachers of the Association for Lancashire, Cheshire, and Derbyshire. Twelve years before he had presided over a similar meeting. The conference was held on both occasions in the Baillie Street Chapel, Rochdale. On this occasion Mr. Bright delivered the following address.]

THE longer I live the more I find the difficulty, for there is great difficulty, in adhering to a good resolution. I had made a resolution, if I could escape from the weariness of an unprofitable session of Parliament, that I would carefully abstain from attending or taking part at any public meeting of any kind. Perhaps there is a cause and a justification for my neglect of a resolution that I had strongly formed. When my friend Mr. Pollitt and his friends called upon me and asked me to take the position I now occupy I was weakened in my resolution by the consciousness that this meeting would be composed of men who are making, and have made, great sacrifices for a noble and a holy cause. I knew that many thousands of them gave up the calm and the rest of Sunday for the service of the children of the less favoured classes of our fellow-countrymen, and I recollected that I have never shared in their labours and in their anxieties; and then it occurred to me that if it were possible by my presence here to give the smallest help and encouragement to labours

so good, that help and that encouragement ought not to be withheld.

This assembly represents, I understand, the teachers of more than 400,000, perhaps nearly 500,000 children in the Sunday schools in a district extending not far from this. I know not exactly how many of the counties are included in this district, but the teachers of 500,000 of our children are a body of men from whom much will be expected, and to whom much respect should be paid. In this town alone—I speak of the town and a district within three or four miles of it—there are more than fifty schools represented in this meeting, more than 1,900 teachers, and more than 13,000 scholars; but if we were to add to these the numbers that are not in connexion with this union, the whole number in this town and its immediate neighbourhood would reach, I suppose, to much more than 20,000 scholars, and the number of teachers of course would be in proportion increased. One fact has been stated to me which is very consolatory and, in some degree, remarkable, that there never is any difficulty in providing funds for the great work which you are engaged in carrying on; and I am told that in this district of Rochdale and its immediate circle, and in connexion with the schools which you directly represent, more than 2,000*l.* per year is collected for the use of these schools. And a very interesting explanation of this was given me. 'There is no difficulty whatever in raising our funds, for, in fact, our people are educated to give.' I know scarcely anything better than that men should be educated to give; and it has always seemed to me that rich men, and men even of moderate means—according to their means—who do not give, miss one of the greatest pleasures of life, and one of those paths in which men, if they are judicious, may be eminently useful.

It is, I think, about twelve years since I was on this platform, I suppose this identical platform, at a meeting somewhat similar to this. On that occasion I referred to the

probability, and the hope, at least, that at some not remote period we should have a general system of education established by Parliament throughout the kingdom. Four or five years after that such a system was established, not precisely such as we approve, having, no doubt, considerable, even great, faults, but still a great measure of service, the benefit of which, I believe, every day and every year, and through all succeeding generations, the people of this country will acknowledge to have been great. It occurred to me at that time, and has often done so at other times, that under a general system of common schools the labours of the Sunday-school teacher would be lightened and the results of his labours would be increased. I have asked whether there is any such change observable in this district, and I am told, on what I think is good authority, that such a result is observed, and that the change is favourable; that the children who come into the Sunday schools read better than they did in former years; that many children of twelve or fourteen years of age read as well as or better than scholars of twenty and up to twenty-five years of age, the younger having had the advantage of attendance at the common schools which were not in existence at the time when the older scholars were young. I find also that the Sunday schools are not less generally frequented: and that it is believed and admitted that the labours of the teacher are in some degree lightened; for it is much easier, much pleasanter work for a teacher to teach a young person or a child that is quick of intellect and partly informed than one that is dull and has been left wholly without cultivation. And the teaching which, in the one case, is a labour that is wearisome, and from which men shrink, is, in the other, a labour of love in which from day to day they perceive the growth of the great and holy work in which they are engaged.

Now I ask myself what it is that you propose to do in your Sunday schools. The first thing is that your scholars should

be taught to read well, and to understand well what they read; and if I am not misinformed, their chief reading is in the Scriptures. They are taught the essential truths of Christianity, which, although mysterious, are not many in number. They are taught also Bible history, and they are instructed in the moral teaching of the New Testament; and beyond this an attempt is made to bring to bear upon the scholars all that we understand by civilising influences. We say—that is not the expression I should use, but you say, who are engaged in the work—give us the young people; you then give us the future church; you then give us the future social and public life; you then give us not the children as they are now, but the men and women of future years; you give into our hands to mould and guide even the great nation of which we are a part. You try amongst the scholars to teach them many things which probably in many of their homes and amongst many of their ordinary associates they would scarcely learn. You try to check rudeness, and sometimes, I am sorry to say, you have to check what may be called impiety of speech. You try to teach them to be kind to each other, not to their brothers and sisters only, but to their schoolfellows and to their parents. You endeavour to teach the boys deference to each other, and you fail greatly unless you endeavour to teach them gentleness and kindness to the gentler sex.

There is much to learn, and in childhood it is marvellous how much may be taught. I think Lord Brougham once said that he believed men and women, boys and girls, learnt more up to six years of age than they learnt in all their lives afterwards. I do not know whether that is true or not, but no doubt there is much to be learnt, and therefore much to be taught. If you teach boys and girls to be gentle to and amongst each other, you will teach at the same time probably how wise and how good it is for them to be kind and gentle to what we term the inferior animals, which are perhaps

inferior in power, but not inferior in the highest right of existence, that which they derive from the supreme Creator and Ruler of the world. These creatures—dogs, horses, donkeys—I might mention other animals—are many of them given us for our use and for our enjoyment. I think there is no cruelty more odious or more base than that which is practised upon dumb creatures, who cannot remonstrate, and who cannot show any resentment to us. Now in my opinion, in the management of a Sunday-school, where you have persons, I suppose, all the way from five or six years to twenty-five or thirty years old, on matters even of this kind a Sunday-school teacher may do much, and he may rely upon it that the kindness taught in youth affects and stamps the character in after life.

There is another question that I would just glance at for one sentence, and that is the question which has taken up much of public attention for some years past—the question of temperance. No one will deny, I think, that the cause of temperance owes much to Sunday schools. I think the cause of temperance is advancing in this country, although intemperance prevails to so great an extent. But if it owes much to Sunday schools it asks even more for the future. The children ought to be taught that exhibitions of excess are not exhibitions which should cause so much laughter as sorrow; and they should be taught also that which I should say, perhaps, some millions of our countrymen have discovered for themselves, that there is nothing but an increased safety and increased profit in an entire abstinence from the consumption of articles which, if taken freely, lead inevitably to mischief. If the children whom you teach can read well and think well, if they are reared to generous and kindly and merciful sentiments, you will find that even in our public affairs as citizens of a great country, your efforts, your efforts as teachers in Sunday schools, will guide them into the highest duties of their citizenship.

Now, take the present time in which we are living—the present hour, the present moment. We have, as you know —all men and women capable of thinking must have at this moment—a subject of great anxiety pressing upon them. I shall not attempt to discuss it, because that would be apart from the business of a meeting like this; but I want to ask you this. Do you think, looking from the point of the Christian work in which you are engaged, that the common view of war is a wise or a Christian view? How is it regarded? As a thing that is frequent, that is usual, that is useful, and that is necessary. It comes as heavy rains come, as a bad harvest comes, or some other natural calamity; and, in fact, if we read the history of this country, or of any country, that is exactly all that history teaches us upon this great question. History often forgets, and the people continually forget, how trivial and how insufficient is generally the cause of war. And they forget also, until it is past, and then even they seem soon to forget, its terrible results. Now at this moment we are told by certain newspapers writers, by many public men, and by some persons that we meet in the streets, that a great portion or a considerable portion of the population of Great Britain is very eager for war. May I not ask you if persons of this class, if there be such, are not in almost total ignorance of what it is they propose to go to war for, or to obtain by war? They have some vague notion of national interests or national honour, which are phrases that they have heard repeated hundreds of times, but never once have known to be satisfactorily explained. They are blind to its unspeakable wickedness, to its multitudinous crimes, to its horrors and its sufferings. Now, if our youth were instructed in these things, if they were conscious that the carnage of war sends thousands of immortal spirits unbidden to the unseen world, surely none, in such ignorance as prevails, would urge it upon a government. They would be, in point of fact, so enamoured of

peace that a Government seeking peace would be able to secure it. They would be so much against war that they would be enabled to restrain any Government that, step by step, might seek to involve the country in the calamity of war.

The Sunday-school, as I have said, has done much, and it may do more. I confess that when I look at its labours I do not consider the teaching of reading to be in any way superior in importance to the moral influence which it may bring to bear upon millions of our population. I think the influence of a good man or a good woman teaching ten or twelve children in a class is an influence for this world and for the world to come that no man can measure, and the responsibility of which no man can calculate. The school then may do more. It may raise and bless the individual; it may give comfort in the family circle, for the blessing the child receives in the school it takes home to its family, and can communicate to the circle which it finds there. It may check the barbarism even of the nation; and if at this moment it could give us all we may rightly expect of it in the future, it might save us from the regret and the sorrow which, as a people, we cannot escape, if another bloody chapter be added to the annals of our times.

I must ask you to forgive me for the last observations which I have made. I have referred to a question which it is almost impossible to avoid speaking of, for it is impossible to avoid thinking of it at this most perilous hour. I speak to you as to Christian men. If on Sunday last it had been put, or if on Sunday next it could be put, to all the Nonconformist free church congregations throughout Great Britain, whether it were the duty or the interest of this country to be involved in war or not, I have no doubt whatsoever that throughout all those congregations, from Caithness to Cornwall, there would have been a universal and unanimous voice in favour of the preservation of peace.

Lord Derby said not long ago that the greatest of British interests was peace. Can it be possible that the Christian men and women who are engaged in your holy work should not coincide with him in that view? You are yourselves the ministers, humble but earnest, of the Prince of Peace. It is, therefore, within your calling, within your solemn duty —even it may be your special duty on an occasion like this—that you should express some feeling on this question; and if there ascends from your heart a prayer to the throne of the Most High on behalf of your children and on behalf of your nation, let it be a prayer that He may turn the hearts of your rulers from thoughts of war, and bring them to sentiments of mercy and of peace. When I think of the illustrious lady who sits upon the throne of these realms, when I think how bright in the main are the annals of her reign—the one greatest blot upon them in our time, and until now, is the war of twenty-four years ago—let us hope that our hearts may be spared the sorrow that must afflict us, and the record of her reign be spared the additional blot which would be cast upon it if again the blood of our countrymen should be shed in favour of a cause which no man can distinctly define or describe, and in pursuit of objects which no rational man in the world believes it is possible for arms to obtain.

XXXI.

MANCHESTER, APRIL 30, 1878.

[On this day a demonstration in favour of peace, and with the object of criticising what appeared to be the tendencies of the Government in connexion with the Eastern question, was held in the Free-trade Hall, Manchester. The meeting was very crowded, and was attended by many delegates representing the towns in the neighbourhood of Manchester. Mr. Bright opened the proceedings with the following address.]

We are met at a time, as most of us, I think, believe, of great peril and of great anxiety. Our ears are filled with evil rumours, and facts, ever-accumulating facts, from day to day point to the near approach of war. Notwithstanding this, we are constantly told by those who are the confidential advisers of the Crown, who are intrusted for the time with the direction of our national affairs, that they are acting strenuously on behalf of peace. For my part I have very little sympathy with efforts on behalf of peace which lead naturally to war. Four-and-twenty years ago I remember a case not unlike this. Reading the other day in the second volume of 'The Life of the Prince Consort,' I found a statement which is very suitable for us to consider at this moment. At that time Lord Stratford de Redcliffe was the Ambassador of England to the Turkish Government at Constantinople. He professed to be strenuous for peace, but in a letter written by the late lamented Prince Consort to his

confidential friend, Baron Stockmar, on the 27th of November in the year 1853, three or four months before the war began, he says—'Lord Stratford fulfils his instructions to the letter; but he so contrives that we are constantly getting deeper into a war policy.'

Now, it appears to me that, notwithstanding the strenuous exertions of the Government, we are continually brought nearer to the precipice and to the abyss of war. The First Minister himself assured us, I think, on the very night of Lord Derby's resignation, that there was nobody in the kingdom more assiduous and ardent on behalf of peace than were the members of her Majesty's Government. But notwithstanding that, every step that is taken indicates a nearer approach to war; and if it be true that a man is held to be responsible for the natural effects of his conduct, then it may be held, and it must be admitted, that the Government which, step by step, brings us nearer to war, and by steps which do not exhibit the smallest disposition for peace,—that Government must be held to be, in favour of war. If we take the speeches and the acts of the Prime Minister for two years past, if we consider this fact—that all the war newspapers particularly point to him as the man in whom they trust, that all that portion of the Tory party which we may call the war section of it looks to the Prime Minister as the represenative of their views, then surely we cannot be wrong in believing that war is intended, and that it is near at hand.

I observe that last night, in a speech delivered by a member of the Cabinet to a great meeting at Bradford, this extraordinary assertion was made—that a war party, a war minister, was an impossibility in this country. I might refer to that speech of Mr. Hardy's, which to my mind was full of boisterous and reckless assertions, that had in it from beginning to end scarcely a spice of anything like logic. It was a speech which was no doubt, at least he thought so, suited

to the mental and political capacity of the Conservatives; but it is a speech, in its boisterous recklessness and in its want of logic, which I hope could not have been delivered with approbation before any assembly of the Liberal party. But what is it that two of Mr. Hardy's colleagues have told us?—that there is a war ministry and a war party; and because they would not longer serve under the one, or in respect of this great question belong to the other, Lord Carnarvon and Lord Derby have left them. You know Lord Derby in this county—you knew his father before him—you know how much he has been allied with the present Prime Minister for the last five-and-twenty years; you know—no, you do not know, but you may imagine, to some extent, how much it must have cost him to sever himself from his ancient colleague, and, on this great question, from the party with which he has been connected ever since he came into public life. And yet so solemn did Lord Derby consider the crisis at which we have arrived—so convinced was he that in alliance with the Prime Minister all his efforts as Secretary for Foreign Affairs would be unable to keep us out of war, that he shook off the dust from his feet against them. He went out from amongst them, declaring by his act that he would not be in any degree a participator in the great crime they meditated against the true interests of his country.

But if Lord Carnarvon and Lord Derby have no confidence in the Government of which they were members and in the Ministry, how can they expect that we or the country at large should have confidence in them? Where there is no truth, and where you have found out that there is no truth, there can be no faith. I ask your attention to one or two facts which I think will justify me in the observation I have made. Go back to the meeting of Parliament; go on from that day about a week, and you will find a notice of what was called a vote of credit. A vote of credit upon the people, surely enough; a vote of discredit upon the Government. I took

the liberty of asking in the House of Commons what was the object of this vote—what was to be done with the six millions? Are you going into a Congress—a Congress of European Powers—with shotted cannon and loaded revolvers? But it was denied with something like indignation. The very smooth-tongued representative of the Government in the House of Commons gave us to understand that nothing could be further from their thoughts—it was, in point of fact, something of a vote of confidence. They asked that Parliament should unanimously, or by a great majority, consent to this vote, to tell the nations with whom they were about to negotiate and assemble that they represented a united Parliament, which represents a united people. But nothing was further from their object than shotted cannon and loaded revolvers; and they went so far as to say that probably very little of this money would be wanted. I am not sure on one occasion it was not said that possibly even none of it might be spent. Well, what happened? Immediately the vote was agreed to the spending began, and it began in the most reckless manner. We heard from paragraphs in the newspapers, in the main I dare say on this matter not incorrect, that they were buying and ordering hundreds of thousands of sandbags down at Dundee to be used for fortifications. In Manchester they had taken a great warehouse, and were packing hay for exportation for the cavalry; the limit of the price of horses for the cavalry had been raised, and they were buying horses everywhere; and then immediately afterwards, although it is admitted, admitted by their own press, by their own officers, that England has at this moment a naval power at sea exceeding that combined of the rest of Europe, yet they bought three ironclads, two of which I believe belonged to Turkey, but which Turkey could not take away during the war or which Turkey could not pay for. The other is said to have belonged to the Emperor or Government of Brazil. Now by this means, in

the course of less than two months, they had spent three-and-a-half of the six millions, and so far as they dared they have departed from the kind of smooth half-promise which was given in the House of Commons that little, if possible none, of this money might need to be expended.

Now we come to another question, the question of the fleet. You know that the fleet was ordered to the Sea of Marmora, and having got upon its way it received a telegram which required it to turn back. If the forts of the Dardanelles, as was expected, had fired on the fleet, and the fleet had returned the fire, which it certainly would have done, then there would have been an outward and distinct act of war. The fleet came back—came back partly to secure the continuance of Lord Derby in the Government. It came back, and then, only a very few days afterwards, it was sent with fresh orders for the Sea of Marmora. In spite of the refusal of the Turkish Government to allow it to pass the forts, the fleet passed the forts, and since that time has been anchored here and there within the Sea of Marmora. Now, I will not say that sending the fleet into the Sea of Marmora was an act of war. Mr. Hardy says it was not, and that they had a right to send it; but, if they had a right to send it, why did they ask for the permission of the Sultan? Now, what was the pretence on which the fleet was sent? I beg your attention to this when you are considering the faith of this Government. Sir Stafford Northcote, in the House of Commons, stated—I am not now quoting exact words; I am giving you the meaning of what was said—that the purpose of the fleet going into the Sea Marmora was to offer protection to the lives and, as far as might be of course, the property of British subjects, of whom there were a large number in Constantinople. I took the liberty of asking them this question: 'Is the sending of the fleet now into the Sea of Marmora of an entirely different character from the sending of it there on the first occasion

when it proceeded partly on its way there but returned?' and he answered that it was an act of a different character, meaning, of course, that the first was an act of menace—I will not say of war, but an act of menace and a demonstration of force; that in the second case it was merely for the innocent object of protecting the lives and the property of British subjects.

At the time nobody said it was not true, but no sensible man believed it, because it was not necessary to send four or six enormous ironclads to give such protection as might be required, if any were required. But the fact is, none was required. Even the English Minister at Constantinople, ready enough to send telegrams to alarm us, had not intimated to the Government that it was necessary for the protection of the lives and property of Englishmen in Constantinople that any English force should be near that city. And what is more, there was not a single minister—I mean ambassador—of any other European Power who had hinted at such a necessity to his own Government, and no other Power sent any fleet to the Sea of Marmora. But what said the press? All the war press, who speak the sentiments of the Government, and especially of the Prime Minister, they all not only admitted but exulted that the fleet was gone there, and was gone there as a menace and demonstration of the power of England; and I believe there was not a newspaper in Europe that dealt with this question or discussed it that did not come to and express exactly the same conclusion.

But we have had a new reason given, and that was given last night by Mr. Hardy. The fact is that members of the Government for the last two years have scarcely ever opened their mouths on this question without most distinctly contradicting each other. Last night, speaking of the fleet, Mr. Hardy said England had many subjects in Constantinople, and if anything had happened to bring the forces of Russia into Constantinople, it would have been necessary to

protect their interests. The fact is, the only reason for fearing that the Russians should enter Constantinople was the very presence of that fleet; and nothing is more certain than this, that if the Russian army had entered Constantinople, or the English army, or the forces of any civilised and Christian power, the lives of British subjects or any other subjects would have been just as secure as they would be and are in London or in Manchester. Now last night was the very first time that this has been given as a reason, and it is a reason which has no more foundation in reality and in truth than the other reasons to which I have already referred.

We come next to the question of calling out the Reserves. We had then the resignation of Lord Derby, and we had at the same time exactly the same smooth-spoken story in the House of Commons. If you have read the newspapers with any care you will have observed that from the beginning of these difficulties—I speak of the last two years—there has been a great difference between the tone often taken in the House of Lords, especially when the Prime Minister has spoken, and the tone taken by the leader in the House of Commons. Now, Lord Derby thought the calling out of the Reserves was an important matter, followed as it was to be by other measures which he was not then at liberty to indicate, but with which he was acquainted. We come now to the day when Parliament separated, on the 16th, that is a fortnight ago. I was in the House that day, and heard the leader of the House, again in the same tone—'There was not the least danger of anything; he did not apprehend anything; things really did not look a bit worse than they had been some time ago;' and there was a general feeling of a sort of comfort in that sometimes disturbed, but always in matters of this kind credulous assembly.

But what happened the very next day? The moment the door of the House was shut and the key turned in the lock—on the very next day, I believe, it was—you had that amazing and

alarming telegram from Calcutta or Bombay, that I know not how many thousands of Mahometan soldiers from India are to be brought to Europe for the purpose, I presume, of fighting, it may be, against the Christian nation of Russia. But when we asked them a short time ago to lessen their military expenses in India for the purpose of enabling them by a greater economy to abolish the duties upon your manufactures, the reduction of the armaments was said to be impossible. But now to follow up this policy, this blind and wicked policy, that is being done — for to-day or yesterday some of these troops were to leave Bombay — that had been done or was being done which had never been contemplated by any Minister in past times. We have a war just now going on, and it is rather a troublesome business, on the continent of Africa. Apparently within a very short time the flames of war may be lit, and lit by England alone, over two great continents. We shall then be carrying on war, murder, rapine, all the evils which are included in the word war; we shall be carrying on this dreadful game on three of the four continents of the globe. Consider this, you Christian men who go to your churches and chapels every Sunday, who carry your Bible or your Prayer Book, who listen to those beautiful hymns, who listen often to impressive sermons, who listen to earnest prayers, who have within your souls emotions stirred which too often slumber during the busy activities of the week. So that all this country every Sunday is engaged in this worship and this acknowledgment of Him who was called the Prince of Peace, and yet you have a Government which, on a question which not one of them can define, and for reasons which they yet have never condescended accurately or clearly to specify—you have a government that would lead this Christian nation to sanguinary, murderous contests over three great continents of the globe.

Sir Stafford Northcote, of course, in the House of Com-

mons knew at the very moment he was speaking these smooth words to us, that he was about to allow the House to be closed for three weeks; and he knew at that moment that orders had been sent out and were being executed for bringing over many thousands of native Mahometan troops possibly and probably to take part in a war between this country and Russia. Surely it would have been a right thing to tell us. What is the use of the House of Commons? We might as well—and it would have saved a world of trouble—have lived under a Government where there was nothing that is called constitutional freedom. We might be living under the despotism which we exercise in India, or under that much smaller despotism which the Czar exercises in Russia. You have a House of Commons which dare not ask, or if it does ask is denied. I say it is humiliating to the House and insulting to the nation. I say then that this Government is open exactly to the charge which the late Prince Consort brought against Lord Stratford de Redcliffe. Lord Stratford obeyed his instructions to the letter—I am not charging him with doing anything wrong—but everything that he did seemed contrived so as to bring us deeper into a war policy. And here, step after step, we see alarm, excitement, irritation, all directly leading to war, taken by a Government which at the same time tells us that it is strenuously exerting itself in favour of peace.

I must ask you to allow me to mention one other subject, which is the subject of the proposed, but now suspended, Congress. All were agreed at first that there should be a Congress. Russia always accepted it. When it was first proposed, this Government immediately accepted the proposition. Russia declared that her treaty with Turkey was only a preliminary treaty, and she knew that there were parts of it which, in all probability, might be condemned by some of the European Powers, and that some alterations might be necessary. But why is it, I ask you now, why is it that this

Congress is not being held? It is this—not that Russia made any difficulty. She started no obstacle; Germany started no obstacle; Austria made no complaint; Italy was satisfied; France went in with the rest. This Government only made the obstacle, and is itself the only Power blameable for the postponement, and perhaps for the abandonment, of the Congress. Until lately, you have observed, in reading the papers, that British interests were the things that we were concerned in. I recollect Mr. Hardy last year, in the House of Commons, made a strong speech about British interests. He asked, Who has given us any mandate—have we any mandate from heaven to enter into contest with the Government of Turkey? He threw aside altogether the idea that you could ever go into war, to any small extent even, or the threat of war, for the sake of liberating millions of population. The only thing, the great thing for a great nation, was to look after its own interests, and in our case our interests are British interests.

But what is the state of things now? The British interest cry has been abandoned. Now we are asked to go to war, or to prepare for war, in defence of what they call European law. Does anybody understand European law outside these islands? Europe repudiates our European law. There is not one of the Powers of Europe at this moment that accepts the objection which we have made. There is not one of them that has put the question to Russia, which Russia refuses to answer in our sense; there is not one of them—Germany, Austria, Italy, France—there is not one of them that is not willing and anxious to go into the Conference on the terms which Russia has proposed, and we—we who have the Government always strenuous for peace—are the only Power that objects to it. There has been a great effort to mystify this question in the minds of the people, and you have found great but cowardly newspapers turning round upon it. Russia has all along proclaimed that she grants to others,

and demands only for herself, full freedom in the Congress. England puts it to Russia in a shape which indicates, as Russia believes, that Russia is to come to the bar of the Congress with its treaty, and to appear there, if not like a criminal, at least as a suppliant, and on her own defence. That is just the state in which the case rests at this moment, and we who are strenuously seeking peace are insisting upon the only present point of danger which may lead to war. But if there should be no Congress, what then? Are we to retire from the question, or are we to insist upon constant menaces—menaces which must inevitably, if persisted in, lead to hostilities? Russia grants all that the rest of Europe requires; England is still the only obstacle: her Minister, the Minister supported with enthusiasm by a large portion, at least, of the Tory party—her Minister is at this moment the only real and great disturber of the nations.

But I ask you what are the grounds of this policy, and I will tell you what is his own statement. He said in the debate in the House of Lords on the night on which Lord Derby resigned, that

> 'It became a matter for the consideration of her Majesty's Government at a period like the present, when the balance of power in the Mediterranean is so disturbed, and when the opportunities of rectifying that balance by the concurrence of the Congress seems almost to have ceased, what steps should be taken to countervail or prevent the mischief impending.'

Then he says—with an unparalleled audacity, I would say—'It was, therefore, in the interests of peace, and for the due protection of the rights of our empire;' and he went on to describe what the Government were to do. Now this is the very first time I have heard of this statement about the balance of power in the Mediterranean. It is a very old hobgoblin, reappearing in a new character, and on a new floor. 'At a period like the present, when the balance of power in the Mediterranean is so disturbed'—and his Government know, and all the authorities know, that we have a

larger fighting fleet than all the rest of the nations of Europe combined; and he then complains that the balance of power in the Mediterranean is so disturbed. If I were a Frenchman, or a Spaniard, or an Italian, or an Austrian, or a Greek, or an Egyptian, or a Turk even, with some navy of more or less power, I should say that the great disturber of the balance of power in the Mediterranean was the British Government. I do not know that anything has been done to disturb the balance of power. Turkey had to guard the Straits, and we broke through her guardianship. But the Straits are reserved by the Emperor of Russia especially, directly, and distinctly for consideration and settlement by the Congress. Those nations I have spoken of, beginning with Spain, going round the northern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean as far as Egypt—they are the nations who have the right to complain of the balance of power in the Mediterranean being disturbed.

The real fact about the Congress is this—at least I think it to be so—I think Lord Salisbury's despatch proves it, the object of this Government is, if it be possible—by negotiations it is not at all possible, if it be possible even by war—to restore Turkey, to attempt to sustain for the future, as in the past, the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire. If you doubt it, I will quote three lines from the speech of Mr. Gathorne Hardy last night. You recollect what Sir Henry Elliot said about the atrocities in Bulgaria—they could make no difference in the policy of England; he said this with reference to something that had happened—that the policy of a great country is not to be destroyed by an incident however horrible or however disastrous. Of those massacres and tortures the lowest account that is supposed to be correct makes it that 12,000 or 15,000 men and women were murdered in that country. This is called an incident, and it is an incident that has no kind of force or importance, and indifference to it is made part of the policy of this

country; but surely it is something when Christian men are asked to go to war to restore a power and a government with whom this massacre is not an incident once in fifty or a hundred years, but is an incident of the usual policy of the empire. If any man will come to the people of England —the men and women of England—and ask them by general vote, Are you willing to sacrifice your blood and treasure to sustain that terrible oppression, that multitudinous crime which we call the Ottoman Government?—I say that the people of England would very soon dispose of any Minister and of any Government who would put the question to them in that naked form.

The fact is we have that celebrated, that famous, or, as it may turn out, that infamous despatch, circulated lately by Lord Salisbury almost the moment he came into his present office, that tells the whole story, which falsely misrepresents in some cases, and condemns broadly throughout, the whole of the treaty between Russia and Turkey. No doubt one reason why this Government did not go into the Congress, or why they were willing to escape it, was this. They knew their objects were not the objects of the rest of Europe, and they were in no sensible man's view at all British objects. They knew that the Powers of Europe in Congress would take no such view of that Treaty, would not permit England or any Power that might by chance unite with her to tear to pieces as waste paper the great instrument of pacification between Russia and Turkey. It may have its faults; I do not deny it; I should like to see a treaty after a war that had not some faults in it that one was obliged to condemn. But it does not signify to us if Bulgaria be a few miles longer or shorter. It does not matter to us that a tract of marshy ground, which is of no real value, and which was given by France and England to Roumania after the Crimean War, and which Roumania did not pay for, and which in the eye of Russia she had

no claim to possess, should be demanded back by Russia; and if Roumania consents, as doubtless she will consent, it does not matter to us, for we have no interest in it. But there is not one of these questions which would entitle us to kill the poorest cripple begging on any bridge in England, or to take the smallest coin from the labourer whose daily sweat earns for himself and his family their daily bread.

The menace of war, if it has any object whatever, has this —To bully Russia into agreeing to certain things, or else to make war upon her if she will not agree; and those things are these—they must be these or one of them— To lessen the freedom of the Bulgarian people, or to sustain the Turkish dominion in Europe. The great question before England is not a party question. It is a question for honourable men throughout the kingdom, whether they are willing again to repeat the great war of four-and-twenty years ago, spend 40,000 of their own countrymen's lives and hundreds of thousands of others, and spend 100,000,000*l.* of their own wealth, and 200,000,000*l.* or 300,000,000*l.* of the wealth of others, for the purpose of bringing about a lessening and a restricting of the freedom of the Bulgarian people, or of preventing any other of the things which Russia and Turkey have agreed to in the treaty which has lately been negotiated between them. The lives of thousands depend upon this—the comforts, not of thousands, but of millions, and not the lives of some and the comforts of more, but the honour and the unblemished conscience of the whole people of the United Kingdom.

Now, one more point and I have done. You are asked to do all this as a sacrifice to your terror of the Empire of Russia. It is stated by one of the editors of the war papers in London that war is inevitable and necessary. 'The world,' he said—I did not hear him say it; I am telling what was said of him, and it was only a natural conclusion from his views. He said, 'The world is not big

enough for the two empires of Russia and of Britain, and it is necessary that the question should be decided once for all which is the biggest, and to which the world belongs.' Well, but Russia, after all, is a nation that would be very friendly with us if we would let it. The Czar was so anxious to cultivate friendly relations with England that he buried in oblivion what he thought was a terrible injustice done to his father, and he permitted the marriage of his only and passionately-loved daughter with the son of the Queen of England. Russia has 80,000,000 of population. Its influence must be great in all its neighbourhood. As you know from the maps, it is adjacent to those countries about which so much discussion has lately taken place, and its influence is inevitable, and permanent, and indestructible. We went into the Crimean War twenty-four years ago, and had the assistance, I think, of 100,000 French troops, who did not care one single sixpence about the Ottoman Empire, but who were led there by the Emperor, who was anxious to go into a political transaction with a respectable political firm. But what happened? You had a great fleet in the Baltic. It went out with great shouts of what was to be done, but came back doing nothing, happily for this fleet and happily for Russia. You had all your force in the Crimea, and it managed to take possession, after a long siege, of one strong fortified city; but when the war was over, and the treaty was agreed to, Russia was still a nation of 80,000,000 people or thereabouts. Russia was still great and powerful, and has every day since been becoming more so; Russia was still adjacent to Turkey; the influence of Russia upon Turkey and upon all the neighbouring States remained pretty much as it was before; and all the sacrifices that we had made and that the French Emperor, or rather the French people had made—those sacrifices went for nothing. Russia was still great, and geographically and providentially she must be great; and Turkey was decaying and going down to that

doom which Providence has decreed shall await all corrupt people and all corrupt empires.

The unreturning brave, as Byron describes them, those who went out there, and who did not come back, who were left to the neglected graves in the Crimea — those you do not see. You see here and there cannon put in some gentleman's park or in some town's market-place, to show what was done by the valour of your troops before Sebastopol. Nobody disputes the valour of your troops. I know no troops that do not on occasion manifest great valour. The Russians, the Turks, the Kaffirs—everywhere there is valour. There is more of that commodity to be had in the world for eighteenpence a-day than of any other commodity that I know of. There is nothing left for us then of that war but sad memories. All sensible men, I think, looking back now, wish that it had been avoided, and that it had not been one of the sad memories which this nation has to dwell upon.

I will make one more reference to a passage in Mr. Hardy's speech last night. That refers to the purpose for which you are wished to go on to the very verge of war, and probably into war itself; and I want to read it to you for the purpose of showing you the shadowy and imaginary grounds on which you are to bring upon your country this terrible misfortune. He spoke of the Ministry of which he was proud to be a member. Lord Derby and Lord Carnarvon were proud to be out of it. The day will come, and the hour draweth nigh, if these people enter into this war, when every honest and intelligent Englishman will be anxious to say, 'I had no part whatever in this policy, and was no supporter of the Government.' But Mr. Hardy says of that Government that 'they were not prepared to see a great shadow cast by other nations of the world'—that is, on this nation. A great shadow cast! Now, try to lay hold of that in your mind: you cannot lay hold of it with your fingers. He says,—

'There might not be in that overshadowing immediate danger to England,

but, as Lord Salisbury well said'—I suppose in his famous despatch—'a Turkey dismembered, pitiful and powerless, or rather a Power in the hands of another Power, exercising dominion over a great part of the earth, presented a danger through which England's interests in Europe might suffer.'

Now, observe: this was said, you know, to 3,000 or 4,000 hard-headed Yorkshiremen, and I presume it had some effect upon them. I recollect in Lord Clarendon's 'History of the Great Rebellion' he gives an anecdote of a gentleman, whose name I think was Mr. L'Estrange, who lived down in Kent, and who raised a troop of soldiers for the defence of King Charles the First. He describes him in this way: 'He spoke to them in a manner peculiarly his own, and being not easy to be understood he the more prevailed with the men of Kent.' And so it is, in a manner peculiarly his own, boisterous, reckless, and illogical, and with language not easy to be understood, Mr. Hardy did the more prevail with the men of Bradford. No, I ought not to say the men of Bradford, but what they call in softened phrase the Conservatives of Bradford.

Regard the passage once more, and have some commiseration upon your Conservative friends, whose sense has not enabled them to detect the utter absurdity and nothingness of this passage. 'They are not prepared to see a great shadow cast by other nations of the world. There might not be in the overshadowing immediate danger to England, but, as Lord Salisbury had well said, there might be a Turkey dismembered, pitiful, and powerless,'—by which I suppose they intend in future, through their war, if they go into it, to have a Turkey again which is not dismembered, and which is not pitiful, and which is not powerless. 'A Turkey dismembered, pitiful, and powerless, or rather a power in the hands of another power exercising dominion over great parts of the earth, presented a danger through which England's interests and Europe's interests might suffer,'—not will suffer, but might suffer—a distant, and a remote, and a shadowy, and at best an imaginary evil; and yet on this

'perhaps'; it recalls to my mind the passage of one of our poets. He says:—

> 'On this *perhaps*—
> This peradventure, infamous for lies,
> We build our mountain hopes, spin
> Our eternal schemes.'

If we had Mr. Hardy's policy and that of his Government, I fear we should rush into that enormous, that incalculable crime, for which language has no word but one which conceals its meaning—but a crime which involves a multitudinous murder, the shedding of torrents of blood over many of the fairest regions of the globe. I ask you here—it may not be worth while to ask any Conservative here or outside: there must be Conservatives so called who vote for Conservative candidates, who have I trust some idea beyond that of the mere superiority or success of party—there must surely be Conservatives as there are any number of Liberals who consider great national interests and great truths to be superior to the demands of party; and I ask them whether they will be led in this career and to this terrible catastrophe by a Minister—for I hold that I am not describing the policy of the country—I am not even describing the policy of Parliament—I may not be describing even the secret wished-for policy of the whole of the Cabinet—I am describing, as far as I can gather it, the policy of a Minister, a Minister who for forty years has never yet been known of his free-will or from an earnest and liberal mind to say or do anything for the advance of any of those great measures of good and of freedom which have distinguished the legislation of this country.

Will you, will the Conservative party even, seeing the course taken by certainly two of the most eminent of their party—Lord Carnarvon and Lord Derby—will they be willing at the beck of one man to spread the flames of war over two other continents—South Africa being already disturbed by extensive hostilities between the native population and our-

selves? I do not think that when the people consider it more —and every day that passes and every week that comes enables them to consider it more—I do not believe that they are willing to accept the responsibility of vast bloodshed for such a cause.

I stated the other day at a meeting at Rochdale which I was permitted to address, that I thought if a poll were taken of all Free Church and Nonconformist congregations of Great Britain on a Sunday morning there would be a universal and unanimous vote in favour of peace. Let it not be supposed for a moment that I wished to insinuate there were no congregations of Churchmen and no Churchmen of the Established bodies in Scotland or in England who are in favour of peace; but they, as you know, are more allied in sentiment with the Executive than we are; they are more accustomed to be docile and to listen and to submit; but I suspect if it was put even to them there would be by no means that unanimous vote in favour of the policy of the Government, and of the war to which that policy leads, which some persons might expect from them. Now my consolation and my hope is in this, that the love of justice, as I believe, the love of mercy and of peace, is not dead in the minds of Englishmen. I wish that it may grow and may strengthen from day to day, and that growing and strengthening it may baffle a policy which is hateful in the sight of heaven, which to my mind is profoundly wicked, and which I feel certain beyond all possibility of doubt is a policy which is hostile to and may, if persisted in, be fatal to the greatest and highest interests of the Empire.

XXXII.

BIRMINGHAM, APRIL 16, 1879.

[In consequence of the early meeting of Parliament the annual speeches of the three members for Birmingham, generally made in January, were postponed till the Easter recess. The address of Mr. Bright on this occasion chiefly dealt with the Eastern policy of the Government and the prospects of finance in India.]

I CAN assure you that if it be a pleasure to you to come here again, it is at least an equal pleasure to me to be permitted to stand on this platform and see again so many of those who, during more than twenty years, have manifested to me by so many tokens their friendship and their confidence. But if it be a pleasure to be here, that pleasure is mingled with some sadness and some regret, because, in looking back to former meetings, I feel as if some great change had come over us. In those meetings—in most of them—we could rejoice at the progress of some great principle, or that some great principle had been established in some act of beneficent legislation. At this meeting the most sanguine of us cannot find any cause for rejoicing or exultation. We have not one single great measure to point to which has been the result of the deliberations of the existing administration. We know that there is a Parliamentary majority supporting a Cabinet with the usual number of

Ministers, but we find that the majority is powerful only for resistance, and that the official advisers of the Crown appear incapable to devise and the general body of representatives unwilling to carry any of those measures which the people of England have a right to look for from their Ministers and from their Parliament. But it may be asked, 'What are they doing?' for twelve Cabinet Ministers, meeting, as you see in the papers, often two or three times a week, must be doing something, and a Parliament with a majority of sixty in favour of those Ministers cannot be wholly idle.

What the Ministers are doing is just this—nothing whatsoever that is useful at home, and everything that you can imagine that is mischievous abroad. Since I have been in Parliament it has always been a complaint with me, or a matter of regret, that Cabinet Ministers spend far more time in discussing foreign politics than in reforming home affairs. If you go back a hundred years from now, as far as you have an account of what the Cabinet was doing, you will find that it was discussing how it could force the colonies of North America to pay English taxes without being represented in the English Parliament. That was the great policy of the day. But, as you know, it entirely failed, and the thirteen little colonies of that time have now grown to be one of the most powerful nations of the globe. If you come down twenty years later—eighty years ago—you will find the English Cabinet constantly discussing how it might be possible, with the help of all the resources of this kingdom, to suppress the Republic on the other side of the Channel. Yet now you see that the whole of that policy was a failure, and that there exists at this moment, with the consent and sympathy of almost all classes in this country, that once dreaded monster a French Republic. And if you came down nearer to our own time, to twenty-five years ago, you will find an English Cabinet discussing for almost two years nothing but questions connected with the great contest

with Russia, carried on, as you remember, in that part of the Russian Empire which is called the Crimea. Well, there was a partial success, as there was a partial success in the suppression of the French Republic of 1789, and in the overthrow of the Napoleonic Empire in 1815—there was a partial success in the Crimea. Yet that policy was rotten from the beginning, and it has been followed, as you know, by an entire failure. There is not a single thing that was obtained by the Treaty of Paris as a result of the Crimean War that has not been surrendered and entirely given up. You will see, then, from these examples—and I might occupy your time the whole evening with other examples—that the present, almost always with regard to foreign policy, condemns the past, and you may argue, as I venture to predict, that the future will likewise condemn the present.

Now, what is the source of all the difficulties of which we have been hearing so much for the last three years? I want to show you what, to my mind, is a very evil policy, and to point out what, in my view on these matters, is a right policy; for unless the country understands what is right and what is wrong in its policy, how can it control the Government if the Government seeks to do wrong? A great source of our difficulty lies in this, that many people in the country, not all—whether a majority or not I cannot say—have a great dread of Russia, not because they think that Russia can touch England either by fleets or by armies—there are none of them, I hope, so stupid as to imagine that—but because they fear or suppose that Russia has the power to disturb, and it may be to overthrow, the great Asiatic Empire which is governed from this country. Now, my view of the case is, that if it be fairly examined it will be found that this chronic fear of Russia arises from a long-held suspicion based upon a profound ignorance of almost all the facts of the case. Let us reason together for a little while on this point. You are an important section of this

nation, and you fairly represent, I have no doubt, to-night, the interests of the vast bulk of the people. I have paid constant and incessant attention to these questions. I have had as good opportunity as any man of understanding them. I have no interest apart from your interests, or the true interests of my countrymen, and therefore I venture—I think I may venture without presumption—to enter upon these great and sacred topics which some people in Downing-street think are to be kept for monarchs and statesmen only.

I shall treat first the question of this anxiety and suspicion which we have about Russia. Afterwards I shall try to show how unfounded and unnecessary it is. Whatever may be said about the Crimean War or its results, of this one thing there is no manner of doubt or difference of opinion, that it cost this country, I will not say exactly how many, but most people have estimated it from 30,000 to 40,000 lives, with from 80,000,000*l.* to 100,000,000*l.* sterling. Now, our loss was probably not more than one twentieth of the whole of the lives that were lost in that war, and it was not more than one fourth of the money that was spent in the war. Now we come down to three years ago, when this new Russian and Turkish trouble began. I believe the war was only avoided last year from two causes—one was the moderation of Russia immediately after her triumph over Turkey, the other was the course taken by the great Liberal party, by the Nonconformists especially as a great portion of that party, and by the foremost man among the statesmen of this country. There are men who cavil now at the position which Mr. Gladstone occupies. I shall say nothing in his defence, but the posterity of those who now slander him will be ashamed of the opinions and of the conduct of their forefathers. But though we have escaped war, we have had, as you know, fleets moving between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, moving and menacing in great force; and we have had reserves called out, as if some-

thing dreadful was about to happen; and we have had Indian troops—a thing almost unknown in our history—brought into the Mediterranean with a view of carrying on war against Russia; and we have had votes of money which it was said would probably not be spent, but which were very suddenly and speedily spent.

But what has been the actual result? The result of the Crimean War, of the American and of the French War, was not more absurd and not more discreditable. The result was this, that two English Ministers, special counsellors of the Queen, went to Berlin. They agreed to everything, so far as I can learn, that was of any importance, to everything which Russia had agreed to with Turkey, except as regards a particular province which Russia proposed to make wholly free from Turkish rule, but which the English Ministers acting in your name objected to. That province they cut in two, and handed over half of it to the Turk. Now I believe that will be held by the people of England, when they consider the question fairly, to be a great blot upon our character and our reputation. We have been in the habit of calling ourselves the friends of freedom. We planted the American colonies: they are a great free nation. We planted Canada: Canada is a free country. We planted the colonies of Australia, and you may see there the great young growth of nations that are to come. We rejoiced when the colonies of Spain in South America freed themselves from the dominion and the tyranny of the mother country; fifty years ago we rejoiced that Greece had become a nation; and, later than that, we have been glad that Italy is free and united. Now, during last year, 1878, we, the people of England, were made to hand over a large portion of the Bulgarian population which had been freed by the blood and treasure of Russia to the odious government of the Turk. But that is by no means all that we have been doing. We have entered into a joint-stock company, and paid 4,000,000*l.* for shares in the

Suez Canal. Besides that, we have taken possession—not by purchase or conquest, but by a system of persuasion and bullying and hiring—of a large island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean; an island which you may make anything you like of, if you spend enough upon it. At present not much has been spent; but if the policy under which it was taken from the Sultan is to be pursued, it may cost us very dear indeed, before it becomes what we are told at some future time it may possibly become.

Then we have undertaken to defend what is called Asia Minor. If you look at the map of Turkey and Asia Minor you will find that this includes all the territory between the Bosphorus, on which Constantinople stands, and the Persian Gulf, which stretches, as it were, on the one hand to Egypt, and on the other down to the Persian Gulf. It is more than 1,500 miles in length; and all this you have undertaken, by what is called the Anglo-Turkish Convention, to defend, and what would be even more impossible, probably, to reform. Then you have seen, within the past few days, that there is a new and distinct and additional muddle with respect to the Khedive of Egypt. Now, there are a good many people in London called bondholders, and there are some, no doubt, in Birmingham. The bondholders in connexion with the Khedive of Egypt may be put into two classes; the fools who lent the money, and the gamblers who have been speculating in it since. It is said that France has more fools and gamblers than we have in this matter, and that her Government is very anxious to force the Khedive to pay up to the French bondholders. We, not liking that France should have a special interest there, go in also, although our Government does not care much about the English bondholders; but you observe our Government allows one of its own officers to go there, and France sends an officer there, and these two gentlemen offer to the Khedive to manage all his money affairs; and the Khedive, like a great many people,

does not like this kind of interference, and having read, as I dare say he has read, what Sir Stafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I think within the last month, said, —that the Khedive had a right—that it was within his legal right—to get rid of those gentlemen,—he has considered whether that was not a wise thing to do, and has dismissed them both very suddenly. Now I take the liberty of expressing the opinion upon this matter, that the whole thing from the beginning to the end has been a grievous and very stupid mistake, and that the going into partnership with France in the management of the affairs of a third country is almost sure to lead to great trouble, to irritation, and it may be to entire separation of feeling between the two Governments and the two countries. Therefore, I would have none of it. And now it is found out, as you see, from the papers day by day, that there appears to be no remedy for this. The proper thing for our Government to do is to withdraw, and to allow the Khedive and his creditors to manage affairs as well as they can. They could not manage them much worse. They could not manage affairs much worse than they have been managed in Constantinople.

We now come to this unpleasant business of Afghanistan, of which also you must have read a good deal. With regard to that war which is now being waged in Afghanistan, I doubt whether there has ever been a war more—what shall I call it?—more deformed by falseness and by dishonour than the war now waged with Afghanistan. It is a war conducted notoriously for annexation, whether annexation of a portion or the whole of the country none of us know. I suppose that the Government here will hesitate and give very indefinite orders, and Lord Lytton and the people about him will go on and on, and whether it will end in what military men call 'success,' or whether it will end in what we shall call great discredit and great calamity, it is impossible at the present moment to prophesy. But if you take the map of Europe and Asia, you

will discover, from what I have said and from what you know, that this country, on account of hostility to Russia and fear for India, has undertaken to control or to reform, or to defend, or to annex, or to advise—it has undertaken the responsibity for almost the whole ground from the Gulf of Venice, all round the Eastern Mediterranean to Egypt, to the Persian Gulf, through Persia, to Afghanistan and the confines of British India. Now, is there anything in the world equal to this in folly and impossibility? Who is it that has to do all this but the 34,000,000 of people who inhabit the United Kingdom? Every man, whatsoever be his trade in Birmingham, whatever you turn to to-morrow to earn an honest living for your families, every man of you has got one of this vast population upon his back, and he must carry this burden. You do not find that your colonies have sent you either men or money. Canada has not; the West Indian Islands have not; Australia contributes nothing to the taxes; the Cape of Good Hope is merely exhausting your means. The millions in India itself pay nothing. I am not saying that it is not paying for Afghanistan, but for all between there and the Gulf of Venice India pays almost nothing, and, in point of fact, it is upon the shoulders of the 34,000,000 of persons—men, women, and children—in the United Kingdom that all this enormous burden which has been undertaken, and which may lead to burdens far greater, which we know not yet and which we cannot measure—I say it is upon them that this burden has been cast by the policy which has been adopted by the existing Government.

Now, what is this India—that is another point I would especially ask your attention to—what is this India, about which the United Kingdom and its population are called upon to undertake such responsibilities? The whole of this vast Asiatic country is said to contain 240,000,000 of persons, of whom 200,000,000 are under the direct government of the English Crown, through the Governor-General, and 40,000,000

or 50,000,000 are indirectly acted upon and controlled through the medium of the native princes of the country. But what is the condition of those 200,000,000 of people? They are poor to an extremity of poverty of which the poorest class in this country has no conception, and to which it affords no kind of parallel. They are over-taxed to a degree of which in the worst days of taxation in this country you had no knowledge. The licence-tax or the income-tax—let it be called one or the other—goes down so low as to touch a man of 10*l.* a-year—that is, four shillings a-week. You are in the habit of hearing constantly that Russia is a despotic country and the Czar the greatest of despots. Our Indian Empire contains a population nearly three times as great as that of the Russian Empire, and it is an Empire also that is governed by a despotism—that is, a government which has no representative institutions, and in which a few men with some one at the top of them—an Emperor in Russia, in India a Governor-General representing the Queen of England—administer the whole government of the Empire. It does not follow that because it is a despotism it should be unjust or cruel. There are probably not two potentates in the world at the present time more anxious that their ruling should be just and merciful and beneficial to their populations than the Czar of Russia and the Queen of England. I spoke just now of the Governor-General of India. I think he has about eight gentlemen sitting with him in his council, and they determine pretty much everything that is done in that country. They live for a portion of the year in Calcutta, which is the capital of India; but for the larger portion of the year they live at Simla, a hill country, about 1,000 miles distant, where the climate is more favourable; and there, in a room that would be big enough if it were only 12 ft. square, they carry on the main operations of the government of 200,000,000 of the Queen's subjects. Now, the taxation, as I have said, is oppressive, and oppressive to such

a degree that all the authorities in India say you cannot turn the screw any more, and that if you do, something worse than a deficient revenue may follow. Half—nearly half—of the whole of the taxes, the net taxes of the country, is devoted to the support of the army. There are 120,000 native troops, and latterly, owing to the war in Afghanistan, it is said they have been adding 15,000 more to their numbers, and there are 60,000 English troops, who are said to be mainly kept there to watch the 120,000 native troops. But there is a large Civil Service—that is, gentlemen who are magistrates in various districts, and who collect the taxes. There are among them men of great merit and of great service, and many of them, doubtless, have laboured hard. But I suspect and believe that if an accurate account were taken it would be found that the payments of salaries and pensions which they receive are more than double the amount which is paid to any equal number of persons similarly occupied in any other country in the world. To supply this service about thirty young gentlemen from this country, after passing through a collegiate examination, are sent out to India to take places at salaries of 300*l.* or 400*l.* a-year, which go on increasing, many of them, to 1,000*l.*, 2,000*l.*, 3,000*l.*, and 4,000*l.* They come back home when they are middle-aged, and they return to England a very much respected class of men.

But at this moment India is pretty nearly bankrupt. There is a deficit, and there generally is a deficit. The English Government are proposing to lend them 2,000,000*l.* sterling without interest. This loan is granted in much the same way as that by which foolish people have supplied money to Turkey. Such people have lent Turkey a great deal of money and they receive no interest from it. And then the Government is proposing to raise an Indian loan in London to the amount of 10,000,000*l.* It is not legally guaranteed by this Government, but the people who lend the money believe that if the

worst comes to the worst England will not see them unpaid, and will in point of fact stand responsible for debts which India may be unable to pay. This then is our position, and I have described to you the sort of sacrifice that we are asked to make on its behalf. But some one will say, 'But is there no profit side? Is there nothing to be said against this unpleasant account you give us?' Yes, there is something to be said, and I will undertake in a moment to say it. We have with those 240,000,000 of people what some people would call a great, but, considering the population, what is really a very small trade. You must remember that this country of India has been governed, very much of it, for nearly 100 years by English rulers. It ought to have gained immensely under our rule. But what is the trade we have with India? Our exports to it—that is, all the manufactures of every kind that we send to India, on the average of the last six years—amount to 24,000,000*l.* sterling per year. Now, 24,000,000*l.* is not 10 per cent.; it is not one-tenth of the whole of our export trade. Our export trade being, I think, last year and the year before 252,000,000*l.*, the 24,000,000*l.* will be about 9½ per cent. on the whole amount. The trade in India is more free—I think I may say more absolutely free to us—than that of any other country in the world. Now compare what we do with India with what we do with other countries. To Germany we export 34,000,000*l.* a-year; to France 28,000,000*l.* a-year; to the United States 30,000,000*l.* a-year. For the last two years things have been so bad in America that the exports have fallen off to about 20,000,000*l.*; but to Holland, so small a country as Holland is, we export 20,000,000*l.* a-year; and to so small a country as Belgium 13,000,000*l.* a-year; and to that large country Russia 10,000,000*l.* a-year. These are the averages for six years, but for the last two years Russia has only taken between 6,000,000*l.* and 7,000,000*l.* Russia, like the United States, has what I should call a barbarous tariff.

Now the reason I give you these figures is this,—that for all these other countries I have spoken of we are not bound to any kind of responsibility like that which rests upon us in regard to India. We do not keep special armies for fear that our trade should be some fine morning wholly taken away from us. Nine and a-half per cent. of our whole foreign trade does not seem to me worth that which it costs us; if it cannot be had cheaper it would be much better not to be had at all. I show you that it is less than our trade with Germany, with France, and the United States. It is only 4,000,000*l.* net above our trade with Holland. It is somewhat more than double our trade with Russia, Russia having a very high tariff, and India having almost no tariff at all. Now what is the profit upon 24,000,000*l.* in trade? It is not 24,000,000*l.* If a shopkeeper sells a man 20*s.* worth of something over the counter, the profit is not 20*s.* It may be 10 per cent., or 20 per cent., or 30 per cont., but it is only a percentage on the actual price of the article. Well, if you reckon a profit of 10 per cent. upon the goods sent to India, and a profit of 10 per cent. upon all that comes back, what will it be? It will not be equal to 5,000,000*l.* a-year. It has not been anything equal to it of late. It has not been that amount for years back, for nothing has been so bad as the trade with India. Now for the sake of this trade, which, in favourable circumstances, would not give a profit of more than 5,000,000*l.* a year, or if you like to say I am exaggerating, double it and call it 10,000,000*l.* for the sake of this trade you hold your Empire in India. You hold it at a cost which is more than double all the pecuniary benefits which you have acquired by trade in all that vast possession. But, people may say then, perhaps, 'You will give up India,' and I should say 'No.' I do not say anything of the kind, but I think it would be worth while to become a little more rational about it.

But I have not described to you the whole case. You hear people telling you that Gibraltar is of great importance on your way to India. Gibraltar is a place you hold as the price of the perpetual enmity of Spain, which you obtained by a fraud, than which there is no worse in the history of Europe. Malta is another stopping-place, where you spend—I cannot, I dare not guess the cost to you. Then you have the Suez Canal, Perim, and Aden. You have all these places on the route to India, but excepting the thirty young gentlemen who find places there every year, and the 24,000,000*l.* a year, so much there and so much back, and a profit of 10,000,000*l.*, or it may be of not more than 5,000,000*l.*, there is not a single result which is beneficial to the 34,000,000 of the population of the United Kingdom. Well, now, as to giving up India. No, I do not propose to give up India; all I propose is, that we should try to make the best of it and not the worst of it, and shake off the childish terror by which we have been possessed. We have heard of a neutral zone, or belt of neutral territory between India and Russia, in Asia. I remember some years ago having a conversation on this subject, I am not sure whether it was with Lord Clarendon or Lord Granville, and the Duke of Argyll as well, but they spoke to me about this neutral zone which they were endeavouring to establish with Russia. My opinion was asked about it. I said, 'It is a very good thing under the circumstances, if nothing better can be done; but,' I said, 'it will be a great deal better for Russia and England when there is no neutral zone and when these two empires are conterminous.' Did you ever hear of a neutral zone between the United States and Canada? No. But when the United States, during the late civil war, had a million of men in arms, she did not touch Canada. Did you ever hear of a neutral zone between France and Italy, or Spain and Portugal, or Russia and Germany?

No. But why do these countries remain at peace? Because they have no interest in going to war. If there was only a mountain ridge, or a stream, or a fence that one of these country gentlemen that I so often see opposite me I dare say could leap over on his hunter without the least difficulty—if there was only a barrier like that between Russia in Asia and Britain in Asia, there would be no difficulty in preserving peace between Russia and the United Kingdom. Surely two civilised nations can remain at peace. They remain at peace all over Europe. They remain at peace in North America. They can remain at peace in Asia. Russia is far, I would say, more accessible to us if we were disposed to quarrel with her than we know India is to her. Then, Russia has as great an interest in being absolutely at peace on the borders of our Indian Empire as we have in being at peace on the borders of her Asiatic dominions; and if this is not at once brought about, the difficulty does not rest at St. Petersburg, it rests in this country, and it rests in India. You know that in India the greatest power is in the hands of the army, an army of 60,000 British soldiers and their officers, and 120,000 native soldiers, with British officers, who, according to the Zulu phrase, are not unwilling to wash their spears. They are urging continually, either actively or with a force which is not seen, but fully felt, a policy in favour of annexation and promotion and all the dignities which these Christian kingdoms give to their military servants more than to any other.

But if we had got rid of this suspicion with regard to Russia; if Russia and England were as friendly as Russia has always wished to be, and as I hope the majority of the English wish that they should be, we should get rid of this anxiety. Constantinople would not disturb our dreams, Asia Minor we should forget. The Euphrates Valley would no longer haunt us. We should see the Persian Gulf on the map without terror; Egypt we should no longer fear. Cyprus

was a wealthy and interesting country in old times. I hope it may become so hereafter, but not at the expense of the people of England. One great result would be that we 34,000,000 of Englishmen, planting free countries all over the globe, might find that we could go to bed and sleep in peace even though Roumelia were delivered from the Turk. I say this with regard to the nightmare about Russia. Everything seems to me against it but our own indisposition, it may be, to thoroughly study the question. Geography is against it, all history is against it, all statesmanship is against it, all the conditions of power seem to me against it, and I know not what arguments there can be that can justify to the Government or people of this country that chronic—to my mind almost insane—dread of the designs and the power of Russia that for forty years has exercised so great and so baneful an influence over the feelings and the opinions of this country. I believe that Russia would welcome the change. I do not wonder, however, that Russia does not show any great friendship towards us. Look at the traffic she has in our manufactures. We send her six or seven millions a year, and we bring from her nearly three times as much. We take everything that Russia can export, unless it be tobacco and spirits. We take all free of duty in this country; but if we persist in being constantly suspicious, ungenerous, and hostile to Russia, we cannot expect but that such feelings will be returned. There is nothing that tends so much to friendship as trade, and you know perfectly well that friendship also tends very much to trade. The one acts upon the other. If you are friendly you trade all the more freely; if you trade freely, the more friendly you become. In Russia there are 84,000,000 of people. They grow all things that we want—or rather, nearly all the things they grow we want. They grow corn, they export hides, they export flax, they export hemp, and other things which I need not describe. But if these 84,000,000

had a tariff as free as ours—or a moderate tariff, say, of 5 or 10 per cent. on imports from England—the trade of this country with Russia would gradually and certainly increase, and as it increased our suspicions of Russia would gradually fade away, and the hostile feelings which Russia necessarily has towards us would also rapidly subside, and the blessed effects of trade, which some people call selfish and low, but which God has made to be one of the most beneficent influences among mankind—the great and blessed effects of trade, I say, would put an end to the animosity which has existed between these two great nations, and enable Russia, and ourselves also, to diminish to a large extent military expenditure, and to do what can be done to promote a happier and more tranquil condition of things throughout the continent of Europe.

I have said all that I intend now to say upon this matter, and I have spoken, as you will observe, apart from what may be called the party discussion of these questions. I have wished to lay before you what, in my opinion, is the folly and the mischief of our present and recent policy, and to show you what may be called—or what I think—is a more excellent way. You will observe that I have not assailed the Government. I leave them to the retribution which awaits them. They have played, in my view, falsely both with Parliament and with the country. They have wasted, and are now wasting, the blood and the treasure of our people. They have tarnished the mild reign of the Queen by needless war and slaughter on two continents and by the menace of needless war in Europe; they have soiled the fair name of England by subjecting and handing over the population of a province which had been freed by Russia, through war and treaty, to the cruel and the odious government of the Turk. And beyond this they have shown, in my view, during an interval of five years through which they have been in possession of office and of power, that they are im-

becile at home and turbulent and wicked abroad. I leave them to the judgment of the constituencies of the United Kingdom, to which they must speedily appeal, and to the heavy condemnation which impartial history will pronounce upon them.

XXXIII.

LIMERICK, JULY 14, 1868.

[In the summer of 1868, Mr. Bright was the guest of Mr. Peabody, the well-known American philanthropist, at Castle Connell in Ireland. As the opinions which he entertained on Irish politics, particularly on the subject of the Irish Establishment, were well known, and as the question was at that time generally debated in view of the General Election which was at hand, an invitation was given to Mr. Bright to a public breakfast in the Limerick Athenæum. Mr. Bright accepted the invitation, and delivered the following address, which, printed in abstract only in the English papers, has been recovered for the present volume by the good offices of Mr. Crosbie, the Editor of the 'Cork Examiner.']

WHEN I accepted the invitation of my kind friend Mr. Peabody to visit the banks of the Shannon I had no intention, no expectation, of taking part in any political gathering. For the past five months—for generally five days in each week—I have been obliged to attend political meetings in the House of Commons; and very often, as you know, from four o'clock in the afternoon till near, and sometimes till after, midnight; and, therefore, you can imagine how little, after that continuous service, any man would wish to be plunged, immediately he escaped from London, into any further political movement. But, I do not in the least regret that I am here to meet you to-day, because I think it may be useful—it generally is useful—to confer together on great questions affecting public interests. And

if I had any feeling that I was suffering inconvenience—which I have not—it would be entirely overcome by the extreme kindness with which you have received me. I thank you for your welcome most heartily, and for the address —only too full of praise of myself—which has just been presented to me.

I come, as I hope you will believe, and as I hope those will believe who do not agree with much that I am about to say—I hope I come not in the slightest degree to this meeting as a partisan. As you know, I am not a Catholic, in the sense of any connexion with the Church of Rome, nor am I a Protestant in the sense of any connexion with the Established Church of England and Ireland. I do not come before you with any pretensions to that character of statesmanship which has been awarded to me, but rather as a simple citizen—one of yourselves—to help in discussing a question which at this moment is exciting intense interest, not in Ireland only, but throughout every portion of Great Britain. I may say—and I hope it is without pretentiousness or egotism—that in my humble way I endeavour always to speak publicly to my countrymen as a preacher of political righteousness and justice. I believe that it is in this way only that the unity, true glory, and the happiness of States can be built up.

It is now about twenty years since I was, the only time before this, in your city. I can see—and I have heard much more than I have seen—that there is a considerable change in some respects for the better in Ireland during the last twenty years; but it is not at all to be wondered at. When I was here before, famine and pestilence had scarcely completed their melancholy duty. When I say duty, I regard famine and pestilence as instruments appointed by Providence, to track the ignorance, the folly, and the crimes of men. But since famine and pestilence in their fearful forms have ceased among you, there has been an emigration

unexampled, I believe, from any modern nation and in any modern time; and the result has been that the population of Ireland has been greatly thinned, and it is only reasonable to expect and to believe that there should be better and more constant employment for the population remaining here, and a higher rate of wages than in former times. If you recollect the contents of the Report of the Devon Commission, which I think sat about the year 1845, you will remember that nearly one half the population of Ireland at that moment were in a condition of absolute pauperism. That is a thing which, happily, cannot be said now of such a large proportion of your people.

But it does not follow that because by famine and pestilence and emigration the population of the country has been so thinned, that the remaining portion of the population is in a better political condition; it does not by any means follow that there are no political causes of evil and discontent which ought to be removed. At this moment we sit here, not under what is called the British Constitution, but during a suspension of it as regards this island and its whole population; and indeed what is called the British Constitution, so far as it affects personal freedom, has been I may say for a time abolished. And one very deplorable circumstance attending it is this—that in the House of Commons we have now become so familiar with the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act in Ireland, that when the question is proposed from the Treasury bench it is scarcely deemed of sufficient importance to cause even a lively, I might almost say, a momentary debate. I believe there are persons—I know not whether there may not be some in this room; I know there are not far from this city, persons who have suffered imprisonment for many months, who have had no charge brought against them, who have undergone no trial, against whom there has been offered no evidence, in whose case there has been no verdict, and in whose hearing there has

been no sentence from the judge. If that be so, it seems to me we are compelled to look a little under the surface, and if possible to discover why it is that such a state of things exists. Besides all this, we have, as you know, in Ireland a great military force, a force altogether disproportioned to any necessity there could be for it in a country that was at once well-governed, prosperous, and contented.

I called the other day upon a gentleman near this city, and he unrolled before me the map of the Shannon, and I asked him what those little red circles upon the map indicated? He said they were the jottings down of the places which were Police Stations. I do not know how many Police Stations there were, but on the banks of the Shannon, as far as the map extended, there were probably 200 Stations, not of police with the ordinary truncheon, as we have been accustomed to see police in England, but an armed police which ought not to exist, and ought not to be necessary in any free country. It has been admitted in the House of Commons, during the past Session, and to put it in the very mildest form, that there is a very great sense of uneasiness throughout the country—a considerable disturbance of the public mind—from the impression that there is a wide distrust, if not an absolute hatred of England, and of what is called English rule; that there is, more than this, what may be termed a dreamy looking to the West as the future home of the people, or as the means of some change and some relief. I judge from the cheers of some gentlemen present and the reading of the address, that there are those amongst us who disbelieve in any permanent reconciliation with Great Britain, who think that the only true and lasting remedy for Irish discontent is to be found either in the repeal of the Act of Union or in absolute independence. I merely ask that during the observations I am about to make those gentlemen will listen to me with this feeling—that the subject is so serious to all of us,

that he must be not a wise man who rejects arguments or facts, honestly given, that bear upon this great national question.

I am one of those who admit—as every sensible man must admit—that an Act which the Parliament of the United Kingdom has passed, the Parliament of the United Kingdom can repeal. And further, I am willing to admit, what everybody in England allows with regard to every foreign country, that any nation, believing it to be its interest, has a right to both ask for and strive for national independence. But, then, we are not come, I hope not absolutely, to the point at which that important question must be decided. I am willing and anxious, if possible, to supplement that fraudful, as I may call it, Act of Union by deeds of generosity and of justice, which shall really unite the three kingdoms. And I would offer to the Irish people that more durable and solid independence which they may possibly think is the portion of a great and prosperous empire, whose councils and whose example would move the world to great and noble ends. Some gentlemen will say that there has been sufficient experience, and that my propositions are too late. I have never said that they are not too late. I only propound my theories as an experiment, and I do not want to force any man to believe that I am wiser than he is in a great question like this. But, standing here from that country from whom you have suffered so much, I ask you to listen whilst I propound theories which to my mind have a chance, at any rate, of being useful to the three nations in time to come.

In travelling through this country, one may not accept the dictum of your poet, that this is the 'First flower of the earth,' but, at any rate, I think a man cannot live in the valley of the Shannon without believing that it is one of the earth's very fairest flowers. Your climate is genial, your people have at least as many virtues, so far as I know, as other peoples have, and even it is admitted that their

failings lean rather to virtue's side. But it is impossible not to feel that there hangs over the country something like a shadow of the curse of past wrongs, and that there are amongst you afflicting memories that will not sleep. What I would propose, if it were possible for me to dictate the policy of the Imperial Parliament towards Ireland, would be to undo—absolutely to undo—the territorial and ecclesiastical arrangements maintained during the past two or three hundred years though I would do all this without inflicting upon any living man the smallest act of injustice in connexion with his personal interests in those territorial and ecclesiastical arrangements.

The address which you have heard read refers to the question of the land. I shall not take up your time with any discussion on that subject. On several occasions—in Dublin a year and a half ago, in Birmingham last winter, and in the House of Commons during this Session—I have explained, at least in part, my views upon that question. My purpose in legislating with regard to the land would be gradually, but I hope also rapidly, to restore to the population of Ireland—to the skilled farmers, or to those amongst them who save money—to restore to them a proprietary right in the soil of the country. But it should be done through their own industry, and it should be free from the slightest taint of injustice or of spoliation upon the present proprietors of the soil. But as you have heard already, and as we all feel, there is another question which is foremost for the time. No man knows why this, or that, or the other question comes up at a particular time to the front and demands to be settled; but the course of a wise politician—whether elector, as you are, or Member of Parliament, as I am—is necessarily to deal with that question which stands first to be dealt with, and which the public mind is most prepared to support in the settlement which is necessary to be effected.

In saying a few words on the question of the Established Church in Ireland I have a wish for a moment, if you will forgive me for saying it, either that you were all away, or that your number was doubled, and that the new-comers consisted of an equal number of what I will call faithful, earnest, Christian men of the Protestant Church in this country; because I think they are the persons to whom argument is necessary to be offered on this great question. If you were five hundred of these faithful and honestly-minded Protestants of whom I have spoken—and there are many hundreds, and I hope many thousands of such in Ireland, although they are quiet, and we hear little of them in this contest—yet, if I had them here, I should ask them several questions, and wait their answers to them; and I think I should ask questions which honest and Christian men amongst them would find it very perplexing to answer. I would ask them whether they now, looking back over the dismal time of modern Irish history, approve of the ecclesiastical arrangements made for this country by England three centuries ago? I suspect there are very few faithful and honest-minded Protestants in Ireland who would say that they approve of those arrangements. I would ask them, further, whether they think the present condition of the country, in reference to that question, and to the public opinion of the whole Irish nation—whether the present condition of the country is satisfactory or not? I have stated in the House of Commons that although the Irish census gives the number of nearly 700,000 Protestants in connexion with the Established Church, making deductions which are necessary in Ireland, far smaller deductions than those necessary to be made in England, I am certain that the number of those who attend places of worship in connexion with the Established Church—men paying any outward deference to religion in connexion with that Church —will not be more than 500,000 persons. And those

500,000 persons have provided for them by the State—I will put it much below the real amount, but certainly it is more than 600,000*l.* per annum. At the time of the introduction of the Church Temporalities Act, in 1834, the whole of the revenues of the Irish Church were estimated by Lord Althorpe at not less than 800,000*l.* a year; and some of them I think must have increased since, but there is a diminution of about twenty-five per cent. arising from the sale and commutation of tithes, which occurred sometime afterwards. I think, therefore, I am reckoning below the mark when I say the income of the Established Church will be about 600,000*l.* a year. But if the State were to provide with equal profuseness for the other religious bodies of the population of the United Kingdom, it would take an annual sum of at least 36,000,000*l.* to provide for the families of the three kingdoms religious services, with the same degree of profuse generosity which has been, and is now, exercised in Ireland.

These 500,000 persons—and I am merely using an argument which I have used before, but it brings the subject home so much to a man's mind that I think I may repeat it—these 500,000 persons are not more than the population of Glasgow or Liverpool; and what should we all say if the State, for a population like that of Glasgow or Liverpool, established ten or twelve bishops, with from 1,500 to 2,000 clergymen—some of them very highly, and generally all of them well paid? It would be quite clear to every man that such a proposition could only spring from the brain of a man who was in that state of excitement which must be on the very brink of lunacy. If I had these gentlemen here of whom I am speaking, I should ask them this—Whether, looking to the present condition of Ireland and the present condition of the Established Church, if they had to begin afresh, would they make such arrangements as at present exist? I should ask them further—Whether they think the result of the

ecclesiastical arrangements of Ireland has justified the principle on which those arrangements have been based?—whether, for example, the Protestant religion has become in any greater and more evident degree the religion of the people of Ireland? I should ask them further—Whether they think the State Church in Ireland has done anything to promote effectual union with England, or whether it has not rather been a bar to that union?

There is one way in which the Established Church has been a link of union with England. It has been one precisely as the army is or the police is. It has helped, no doubt, to link a nation, always ready to rebel, with a nation which did not intend that it should rebel successfully. But I believe, if it were possible to write honestly the history of that Church as a political institution, it would be found that it has had much to do with the tendency to rebellion in Ireland. I should ask those gentlemen one other question —Whether, looking over history, as long back almost as you like, and looking over the whole of the civilised and Christian countries of the earth, it is possible to find another example of the state of things which has existed in Ireland for some hundreds of years in regard to its ecclesiastical establishments? Let me tell you that I should not put these questions to mere partizans, because they are not likely to be influenced by argument; nor would I put them to Orangemen, whose blood seems always to be at a boiling-point, and who are not capable of taking a rational view of this question. Nor would I put it to any minister of the Established Church—I do not say that there are many such men—who, with his several hundreds a year, is careful only of his income, and cares very little for his office—very little for his people—and, if possible, still less for his country. I would put it to none of these, but I would put it to the thoughtful and Christian men, who have exactly the same interest in right—the same wish to discover and promote

it—as you or I have at this moment. And if I could find five hundred such men, and put these questions to them, I ask you, is it possible they could return any but one answer to the case I had put before them? It is clearly beyond all dispute and contest—every man in Ireland, whatever his religion, must admit it—that the Established Church exists here, not by the will and by the love of the people, but by the influence of a power which does not reside within the limits of this Island. I regard it as you regard it, as all men regard it who are outside the United Kingdom—in all the countries of Europe and in all the States of America—I regard it as a symbol of ancient terror, and not in any sensible degree as a symbol of present peace. In point of fact it may be said to be an institution which, more than all other institutions that ever existed, wars against its own success in the natural order of things. Because it so to my mind seems to shock the sense of justice in every man outside of it, that it repels and revolts every man not connected with its creed, and prevents him from receiving that creed. And at the same time it stimulates the hostility of those whom it insults, against the English power by whom it was established and is sustained. Thus I argue, without fear of dispute or proof to the contrary, that the Established Church in Ireland is anti-Protestant by reason of its unnatural position, and at the same time it is as much anti-English as it is anti-Irish, because it makes it impossible that Irish people should be in perfect harmony with England.

But although a great deal of this can and may be admitted by many upright and honest-minded Protestants, and by some of the clergy of that Church, yet I am sensible of this—that there is great fright amongst them at what they fear is impending. Our great poet has spoken of that

'Fear of change that perplexes monarchs,'

and therefore it is not unreasonable to suppose that there is a

fear of change which enters into many a quiet and comfortable parsonage in Ireland, and frightens many moderate and good men living in them. I am told, on very good authority, that there is a feeling amongst the Church party—I do not like to use the word 'party,' and I withdraw it—but amongst Church people who are simply, kind and good Christian people who love their Church—that there is a feeling of despondency coming over them since the great division in the House of Commons, which appeared for the time to determine the future position of the Irish Church. Seeing that, they are afraid that their Church will fall away, and that the Church of Rome will get what they call the 'upper hand.' As far as the 'upper hand' goes with great majorities of the population, there is not much to be gained by the Church of Rome. But they seem to think this, further—and as you are mostly, I presume, of the Church of Rome, I will not hesitate to say it here—that the Catholics and the Catholic priests will manifest a sort of arrogance, and they will begin, of course, not a legal, but something like a social persecution. We need not be much surprised at these alarms. Their fears are not absolutely unnatural. You know perfectly well that people who have always gone on crutches have very little faith in walking; and, further, that persons who have been long connected, though not with evil intent, with an unjust institution, may easily imagine that they will become the victims of the injustice of others. My own impression is, that these fears, though not unnatural to people in their position, are absolutely groundless. Has it ever occurred to you how very little any of us can see at all, and how very confusedly we see things connected with our own interests, and how much our mental vision is impaired on many occasions, so as to render our opinions worth very little? And when men seem to have their interests touched on a great question like this, by Acts of Parliament and changes made by the Legislature of their country, they naturally feel an

alarm, which those who are outside can scarcely comprehend, and which the facts never seem to justify.

I have before me two scenes which have struck me strongly, in this way, during my political life. Twenty years ago, as you know, the great body of the landlords of this country—and in saying 'this country' I speak of the United Kingdom—held the opinion that they would be absolutely ruined if foreign corn were allowed to come in free. They thought there would be no rents—and that would be a great calamity to the receivers of rent; that there would be no employment and no wages, and that the country would become dependent on foreigners, and that the glory of the English nation would depart. What has happened? We now receive nearly half the food of our people from abroad; and yet the land in England is more valuable than it ever was; the rents are higher; the farmers have never, from that time to this, come to Parliament to complain of their grievances—which is an amazing fact! The labourers find better employment, at better wages. All the fears of the landed proprietors were absolutely groundless; and now, if you remind them of them, they feel ashamed, and would willingly change the conversation.

Another case in point is that of the newspaper press. We laboured, many of us for a long time, to abolish the penny stamp and the duty on paper; and the great newspapers in London, the *Scotsman* in Edinburgh, and many others, were against us. They said that the penny papers would be merely made up of paste and scissors by matter stolen from the respectable journals, and that the respectable journals would be ruined by the competition of these inferior productions. We have now ten times as many papers as we had before; and instead of this new class of papers being inferior productions, they are often quite equal to the old ones, and I am not sure that their competition has not improved those old ones. Any one who knows the statistics

of the United Kingdom knows that the actual saleable value of newspaper property in this country at this moment is at least ten times as much as it was before these restrictions were abolished.

So, I am one of those who do not believe that the Established Church of Ireland—of whom I am not a member—would go to absolute ruin in the manner of which many of its friends are now so fearful. There was a paper sent to me this morning, called 'An Address from the Protestants of Ireland to their Protestant Brethren of Great Britain.' It is dated '5, Dawson Street,' and is signed by 'John Trant Hamilton, T. A. Lefroy, and R. W. Gamble.' The paper is written in a fair and mild, and I would even say, for persons who have these opinions, in a kindly and just spirit. But they have been alarmed, and I would wish, if I can, to offer them consolation. They say they have no interest in protecting any abuses of the Established Church, but they protest against their being now deprived of the Church of their fathers. Now, I am quite of opinion that it would be a most monstrous thing to deprive the Protestants of the Church of their fathers; and there is no man in the world who would more strenuously resist any step, even in that direction, than I would, unless it were Mr. Gladstone, the author of the famous resolutions. The next sentence goes on to say, 'We ask for no ascendancy.' Having read that sentence I think that we must come to the conclusion that these gentlemen are in a better frame of mind than we thought them to be in. I can understand easily that these gentlemen are very sorry and doubtful as to the depths into which they are to be plunged; but I disagree with them in this—that I think there would still be a Protestant Church in Ireland when all is done that Parliament has proposed to do. The only difference will be it will not then be an establishment—that it will have no special favour or grant from the State—that it will stand in relation to the State just

as your Church does, and just as the Churches of the majority of the people of Great Britain at this moment stand. There will then be no Protestant bishops from Ireland to sit in the House of Lords; but he must be the most enthusiastic Protestant and Churchman who believes that there can be any advantage to his Church and to Protestantism generally in Ireland from such a phenomenon.

But all these 500,000 or 600,000 persons will be just as free to keep their Church as they are this moment, and just as free to have bishops and archbishops as the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland is at present. It is proposed to leave them the buildings of the churches, and wherever there is a congregation and minister who are willing to keep in repair the building, to let them have also the dwelling-house and parsonage-house of the minister—all those buildings which you see, some of them so beautiful, in the country. There are two between this and Castleconnell that look like pictures, and are absolutely lovely in the landscape. It is well called the Golden Vale; and I should be very sorry to come to Castleconnell at some future time and find absent those graceful spires which now add so much to the beauty of that landscape. But nobody pretends that that is going to be the case. These churches and parsonage-houses through the country have cost millions, but they will be all left to the congregations so long as they will undertake to keep them in repair. There is one change which is really a change—and that is, that the State should take into its control all the tithes of Ireland and all the lands which are not attached as gardens, &c. to the ministers' houses. I cannot and ought not to venture to say what Parliament will do or what Government will do with those; but I am speaking of my idea as to what ought to be done in this country in this crisis. It is a matter of no doubt that Parliament will be willing to dispose of these funds and that property in accordance with the general views and wishes

of the people of Ireland. They are funds to which Great Britain has not and will not make any claim. The result will be that the tithes now taken from the people will have to be raised by the Church itself—that the rich congregations will for themselves, by contributing help to the poorer congregations, have to do for their Church, what is done by other congregations in many other parts of the world. In the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, there are many churches, many schools, and many manses for ministers; and the rich congregations in Glasgow and Edinburgh contribute towards the support of the poorer congregations elsewhere, so that all the members of these Churches assist in the support of their Church in the remotest parts of the Highlands of Scotland. It is so in Canada; it is so in the United States; it is so in Australia; and it is so in England under the voluntary system; it is so in Wales, and it is exactly so in your own Church in Ireland.

No man knows that he will live till to-morrow, except that he knows that he has lived till to-day; and he must take the experience of all he sees round him, and all that he learns from generations past, to guide him to an opinion on this subject. And surely from such an experience as this our friends of the Established Church may take comfort, and believe that what is done by voluntary Churches in almost every part of the world may be also done by a free voluntary Church in Ireland. Our friends of the Church will have great advantages given them if they thus act. They will have power to control their organisation, free from Acts of Parliament, and thus quietly regulate their own creed and discipline. Strangled almost as they are at present, by their connexion with the State, their Church would then be, if in some degree a small, yet I believe a living, prosperous, and strong religious institution in this island. There would then be generated amongst them a grand bond of sympathy and union which they do not now experience. It would be a

sympathy and an union on the basis of their common love for their Church, as a religious and not as a political institution; and instead of hearing, as we do sometimes now, the ravings of frantic Orangemen, we should see the enlightened zeal of Christian men, and women, and families, acting in the spirit of a free and zealous Church.

These gentlemen say that were they few and scattered, the disestablishment of their Church would deprive them of the ministries to which they have become entitled, and compel them to abandon their posts. But nobody has abandoned his post in Scotland, or Wales, or Australia, or Canada, or the United States, or amongst the Catholic people of Ireland; and I dare not in this audience libel the great body of the Protestants of Ireland, as these men libel them when they say they would not be able to maintain their ministers or their churches. In my opinion it is a very poor faith which clings to Government for aid; and they are but feeble ministers who, declaring that Christ is the living Head of their Church, are yet afraid to march under His banner. And I say farther, that State patronage has made a terrible ruin of courage and zeal in Ireland, if the members of the Established Church, who pretend to love it so much when it is in bonds, would be unwilling to support it when it was in freedom.

But whatever be the fears of these gentlemen of whom I have spoken, I believe that the changes which they dread are now unavoidable. The hour appears to have come; and the transition which many of us have looked for during all our political life is now about to take place. The House of Commons, by a majority of more than sixty, has during this Session passed resolutions declaring that the Established Church of Ireland must cease to exist as an establishment; and I believe it has in this only pronounced a sentence which the new constituencies of the United Kingdom will confirm by a still greater majority. May I ask you whether—and in speaking to you I hope that my words will reach the utmost

limits of your island—whether you, as Irishmen have no special duty in connexion with this question—whether your counties will not make one supreme and stupendous effort in this great coming crisis?

Let me give you one word of warning. There are men connected with your Church—not with the Protestant Church—who endeavour to content their constituents by giving a vote on a broad question like this of the Church, in favour of the people, but who give their otherwise undivided support to that party in Parliament which is in favour of maintaining establishments and has pronounced emphatically against religious equality. Let me exhort every Irishman who cares for his country, to say that, in this great—this supreme occasion—when the constituencies are to decide on their candidates once for all, he will not put political and constitutional power, by his vote, into the hands of men who will only give him an occasional vote in the House of Commons, but who will side with the party that is wholly hostile to him.

This is not a time for shams. The question before you is real. How can you ask the people of England and Scotland—many of them, as you know—how can you ask them to make a sacrifice in which, when the crisis calls you forth, you cannot share, because you cannot stand firmly at your posts and do your duty? What we want is this. It would be greatly to the interests of Ireland that this change now impending, a change which I believe nothing can now prevent, should be made with the overruling assent of the people of these kingdoms. It would add greatly to smoothing the operation of the change, even to those who are most fearful of its consequences, if they found the almost unanimous opinion of the three kingdoms in favour of this great change. They would submit to it as having the voice and sanction of a nation, and would not have to submit to it as a triumph of a party. In these great events there are some evils mixed

up, as there is in all political good. I have come here from a conversation with a gentleman who differs with me, who says that party spirit and enmity which have been the bane of Ireland will be greatly increased by this change. In my opinion that is a mistake. I say the majority, released from the indignity and insult of the present state of things, will show, as they will feel, generosity and magnanimity to their fellow-countrymen. And I say, further, that the minority, being free, as their Church will then be, from the charges which every man may if he likes now bring against them, will feel a new life in all political, in all social, in all religious questions, and will feel the very ground on which they tread firmer below them.

All Irishmen may then discover, whether they are Catholics or Protestants, that they are Irishmen and the people of one country, and may regard the Government hereafter not as the patron and favourer of a political Church or sect, but as the Imperial ruler of a great nation. And the time may come—I hope it may come; I do not say it will come, but I pray that it may—when Irishmen and Englishmen and the people of Scotland may be alike anxious —I will not say for political and military power, but for the greatness, strength, and happiness of this United Kingdom.

In thinking of this great question there always comes to my aid a feeling which I have had ever since I entered the political field—a deep and abiding faith in justice. I believe that justice may be called, of all things, the miracle-worker amongst men. I believe that all men are to be reached by it, and all bodies of men—the inhabitants of provinces as of nations; and there is nothing I believe more firmly than this —that if there be a people on the face of the earth whose hearts are accessible to justice, it is the Irish people. Even now, I venture to say—and I would appeal to gentlemen near me if it be not so—that the discussions during the present Session of Parliament, with the prospect they hold out of

justice on a large question—whether they have not in some degree softened the hearts of many men in Ireland—whether there are not those who have hitherto despaired, but begin now, in some moderate degree at least, to entertain a hope that what they have feared as lasting injustice is now about to vanish for ever from their minds. I believe it, and what is more to the purpose, I believe that the people of England and Scotland are at this moment preparing to tender you a great offer of justice at the general election in November next.

But the Irish people must help them with will and with heart. There can be no great measure of this kind accomplished unless all concerned lend willing hands; and there can be no great act of national and historic reconciliation unless all the parties hitherto opposed are willing to be reconciled. We are met—your kind address has referred to it—we are met in the city of the violated Treaty—violated, as I admit, incessantly during almost two centuries of time. Let us make a new treaty—not written on parchment—not bound with an oath. Its conditions should be these—justice on the part of Great Britain; forgiveness on the part of Ireland. It shall be written in the hearts of three nations; and we will pray to Him who is the common Father of all peoples, and in whose hand are the destinies of all states, that He will make it last for ever and for ever inviolate.

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